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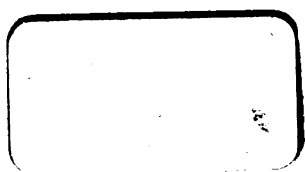
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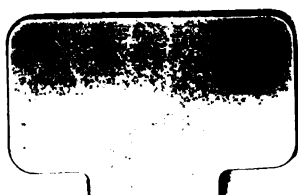
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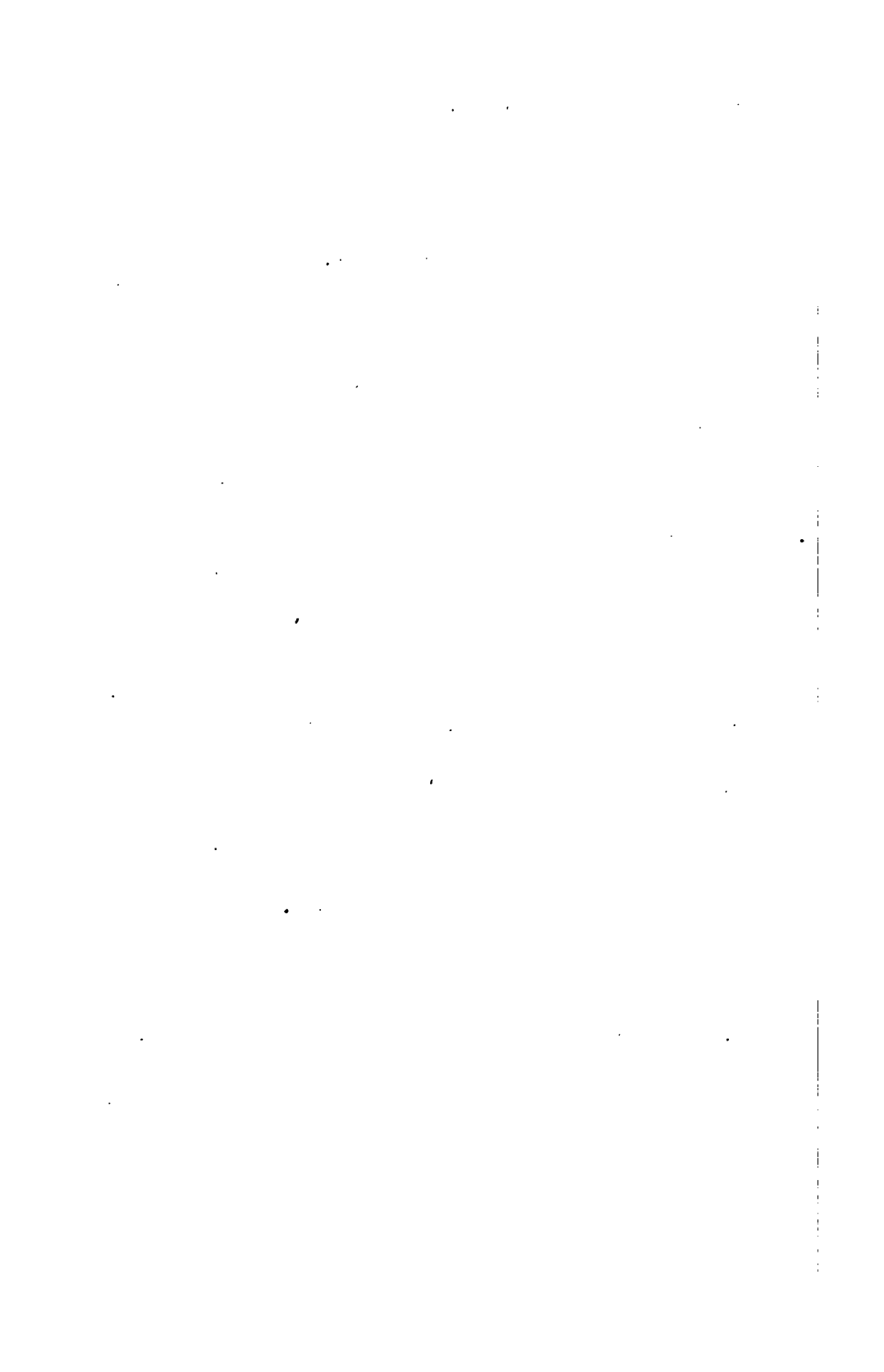


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A FAITHFUL WOMAN.



# A FAITHFUL WOMAN.

BY

MRS. GORDON SMYTHIES,

AUTHOR OF

"COUSIN GEOFFREY," "TRUE TO THE LAST,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# A FAITHFUL WOMAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

. . . . Pauline, by Pride,  
Angels have fallen ere thy time.  
THE LADY OF LYONS.

ARMINE CASTLE, the seat of the noble and ancient family of that name, was a fine old building, in a beautiful park on the Devonshire coast. The estate was a very extensive one, and the grounds were exquisitely laid out. There were tracts of land belonging to the Armine family so wild and desolate, so rocky and so remote, so marshy and so drear, that they seemed fit only to be inhabited by ghouls and bífids. The castle, with its battle-

ments and drawbridge, its turrets and its moat, had once been a royal residence. Dark deeds had been done in many of its chambers. Tortures unutterable had been endured in its dungeons—where, even in the present century, some workmen employed in repairs had discovered a skeleton chained to a wall in a bricked-up recess or *oubliette*.

Armine Castle was situated at a very great distance from any other country seat. The ruins of an abbey, however, could be seen from its tower.

Report said that there was a subterranean passage between the castle and the abbey ; and even at noon, the crab-hunting and shrimp boys shunned the space between the two buildings, as those who had ventured there declared they had heard moans and shrieks coming up as from underground, as they crossed the beach in that part.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is the dawn of a sultry day in July. A soft mist rises from the sea, and envelopes the woods. The rosy morning light illumines the hatchment, whose bright colours—*azure*, *or*, and *gules*—contrast so forcibly with the dark, time-stained grey of the castle façade. That hatchment is placed there in memory of the late Earl of Armine. At this season last year he was living at Armine Castle with his stern, haughty countess. Their eldest son, Lord Loftus, his wife, Lady Loftus (a beautiful young Anglo-Italian), and their lovely little boy of three years of age, a wilful, petted, spoilt cherub, heir-presumptive to all the possessions, titles, and honours of the house of Armine. His father, Lord Loftus, being of course heir-apparent.

The Countess of Armine and her daughter-in-law did not live happily together. The former, who had all the power, made the latter miserable, caused disputes and jealousies be-



twice the son had his wife and was supposed to have been very kind to him. When it was discovered one day that Lady Lotus had secretly left the house. Some said she had eloped with a lover. Some said she had only run away to go back to her own home and mother in sunny Italy. The thing was certain, however, that she was gone and I was suddenly aware that she had intended to carry off her child.

She had a nurse called Emma in whose attachment to her she had full confidence. In Emma she had concentrated all the unwearied attention she was capable of, and to her she entrusted her child, making Emma promise to join her in Italy with her darling child. She gave her money for her journey, and arranged to send to meet her and her darling at Calais.

Emma agreed to do as Lady Lotus proposed, and to set off by train with the little

boy when she took him out for his early morning walk.

Lord and Lady Armine and Lord Loftus were out at the time of Lady Loftus's departure ; but on their return Beagle went straight to them, and with the boy in her arms, deliberately betrayed her mistress ! She knew that Lady Loftus had very little money. She had brought her lord no fortune, and by Lady Armine's advice he had kept her almost penniless. She had talked to Beagle of parting with her watch and the few ornaments she possessed. Beagle, who despised poverty and revered wealth, had said to a fellow-servant, "that she knew which side her bread was buttered." She resolved to betray her mistress, she was handsomely rewarded, and very jealously was little Marmaduke Armine guarded lest his mother should try to get possession of him.

Rage and jealousy at his wife's elopement

(for such he believed it to be) caused Lord Loftus, who had a consumptive tendency, to break a blood-vessel in the lungs. He was in the act of setting off to find out and challenge the supposed seducer when this accident happened. He died; and his father, who had long been ailing, and who had centred all his love and pride in his eldest son, did not survive him more than three months. Lady Armine then reigned alone and supreme at the castle, and little Marmaduke became Earl of Armine.

There is an old superstition that Death, when he enters a family, is never satisfied with less than three victims. And, as if in confirmation of this notion, news came soon after the Earl's death that his second son, Jasper, a captain in the Rifles, had been killed at Natal, in an engagement with the Caffres.

The family, the night before the opening of our tale, consisted of Lady Armine, the infant

earl (her grandson), her third son, Osmond, her late husband's ward (Juliet Rivers), and Dydimus Armine, a poor cousin, dependent and unwelcome. There had been a little party at Armine Castle (a very unusual thing under the grave stern *régime* of Lady Armine). That haughty lady, however, had not made her appearance, but, pleading indisposition, had kept her room. The evening before the bright rosy dawn we have described passed off merrily—it was the little earl's birthday. He was four years old.

The vicar and his wife, and a young nobleman who had just taken up his abode at the vicarage, to read with the vicar, had taken tea at the castle. This pupil (the young Lord Castleville) had paid pointed attention to Juliet Rivers. She was lovely and amiable, but vain—and, alas! coquettish! She knew Osmond Armine secretly adored her, and yet she flirted with young Castleville.

The little earl was in boisterous spirits ; never was there a rosier, lovely, or more wilful cherub. Everybody loved him. He would have made an anchorite smile and a Trappiste talk, but he could do neither with his cold, proud grandam, who was known to regret bitterly that *he* had been born to deprive her favourite son, Osmond, of the title which but for this boy would have been his. The little earl would not go to bed till the party broke up.

Juliet Rivers and Osmond Armine bowed coldly to each other as they parted for the night. And yet both shed some very bitter tears in the solitude of their own chambers, for Juliet, in spite of her vanity and girlish coquetry, loved Osmond Armine ; and Osmond Armine idolized, adored, and worshipped Juliet Rivers.

The castle clock struck two, and Juliet, though in bed, was not asleep. The pale

cheeks and proud yet reproachful gaze of Osmond Armine haunted her. It contrasted so painfully in her memory with the triumphant glance of Lord Castleville as he bade her good night.

"And yet," said Juliet to herself, "I love Osmond, and would rather share poverty with him than an empire with Lord Castleville. How could I be so weak!—so cruel! Poor, dear Osmond!" and she wept.

Juliet's room was in a turret. Above her, Marmaduke (the little earl) and his nurse slept. A winding staircase of great antiquity led from Juliet's room to little Marmaduke's—"the nursery," as it was called. There was a room below Juliet's on the ground-floor, but it was kept locked. No one knew what was in it, but all the servants declared that it was haunted. As we have said, Juliet was still awake when the clock struck two. Everything was still. There was not a sound to be

heard save the screech of an owl, the melancholy howl of a large bloodhound of Osmond's, whose house was in a parterre beneath the turret windows, and the flapping and flutter of a bat's wing outside Juliet's casement. "Ill-omened sounds all of them," she said to herself.

A night-light burned faintly on her toilet-table.

Juliet, drying her tears, tried to compose herself to sleep, when she distinctly heard that startling and mysterious sound, so terrible at such an hour, if we cannot at once explain or account for it—a footstep on the stair! She sat up in bed and listened attentively. She became first red and hot, then cold and pale. Who could it be? The staircase led to no room but "the nursery," and she had seen Marmaduke in his cot before she retired to rest, and had heard the snore of Beagle, his nurse, who slept in an adjoining dressing-

•

closet, with her door ajar. Juliet had made a point of seeing that Marmaduke was not feverish after the excitement of his little birthday party. She had seen him in a sweet, rosy sleep, his golden hair floating in rich curls over his pillow, his parted rosebud lips showing the little rows of pearls beneath, and tightly clutched in his little, fat, pink and white hand, a coral bracelet of hers, which he had carried off in triumph, and had refused to part with either to her or his nurse Beagle, when the latter put him to-bed. As she looked at him she had quoted Byron's line—

“Love's image upon earth without his wings.”

Juliet, still sitting up in her bed, held her breath while she listened. Again she heard that footstep on the stair! It halted near her own door. She thanked Heaven that she had locked it! Once again that footstep! And now a smile, a smile half of love, half of triumph, lights up her beautiful face. She



recognises Osmond's step. She is certain it is his. Ah, doubtless he could not rest, and has stolen to her door to try to hear her breathe, and to find out whether she is as restless as himself. As with her large violet eyes dilated, and her sweet lips apart, she still sits up and listens, her glance falls on a note which a hand outside has thrust under her door. She waits till she hears that well-known footstep re-descend the stairs, and then she springs out of bed, resolved to possess herself of the note. Just as she does so her night-light goes out. She gropes her way to the door, and feeling under it carefully, she finds the note. She hurries back to her bed. It is now quite dark. She cannot even see the paper, much less the writing, but she feels that it is wet.

"Wet with his tears. Poor darling !" she said to herself, as she placed it in her bosom. "And he is not easily moved to tears. I will never tease him so again ; but I will slight

Castleville to-morrow, and thus atone to Osmond for flirting with his dandy lordship to-night. How pleasant it will be to make up this lover's quarrel! Reconciliation is the feast of love. May Heaven bless and keep him! I can sleep now." And though the dog still howled, and the screech owl joined in dismal chorus, and the bat flapped and fluttered its demon wings at her casement, Juliet fell asleep with a smile on her lips, and Osmond Armine's note in her bosom. And she dreamt of bridal favours, orange flowers, and a gay wedding! The expounders of dreams say such are of ill-omen.

## CHAPTER II.

"Hark! 'tis a woman's shriek of wild despair.  
See! see! she beats her breast, and rends her hair!"

LASCELLES.

JULIET was roused from her deep sleep by loud shrieks and cries for help. They were a woman's shrieks, a woman's cries! She woke with a start; it was broad daylight; the morning sun came in through her ivy-draped windows, and played on the old oak wainscoting and rich Turkey carpet. She threw on her wrapper, and rushed barefoot upstairs. The shrieks and cries came from the "nursery." She met Béagle at the nursery-door, and still wildly shrieking—wringing her hands, and almost in hysterics.

"Where is Marmaduke?" asked Juliet, pale as death, and trembling in every limb.

"God only knows, miss," said Beagle. "I dressed myself just now, as usual, when I heard the clock strike seven, and I wondered I didn't hear him singing and hallooing, and calling me, as usual, in his cot; but I thought he was, maybe, tired with his party and late hours, and still sleeping, so I came in quite quietly, and found the cot empty, and all made up as neat and smooth as if he had not been in bed at all, though I put him in myself last night, and sat by his blessed side, singing to him, till he dropped asleep. But, la! miss, whatever's the matter with your hand and the bosom of your night-dress?—they're stained with blood!"

"With blood, indeed!" Juliet cried, and she perceived with horror that it was true. The carpet of the nursery was red, and so were the curtains of the window and cot;

but, on examination, drops of blood could be detected all across the room from the little cot to the door !

Juliet, almost petrified with horror, gazed at her bare white feet—they were stained with blood ; a little while later it was discovered that a small rill of the same crimson fluid had trickled down the stairs, forming a little pool on the landing.

Beagle, upon the discovery of the blood on the carpet, tore the bed open ; the under sheet and under blanket were gone.

“ Murder ! murder ! ” she wildly shrieked, rushing out of the room and hurrying downstairs.

Juliet, cold and white as marble, yet felt in her bosom for Osmond’s letter. It was not there. She hurried downstairs to her own room. The letter lay by her bedside. It was blotted with blood—of course the stains on her neck and night-dress had arisen from

her placing that note in her bosom. With a beating heart she read—

*“Juliet! cruel, inscrutable, but idolised Juliet! Do you then care so much for rank and title? You smile on a fool, a coxcomb, because he can make you ‘My Lady,’ and you would break my heart because I have no such power. Be a peeress—be a lady; if you are happy, I care not what dreadful fate may be the portion of Osmond Armine!”*


As Juliet read these words, a horrible suspicion crossed her mind. She tried to combat it.

“What if the little Earl had been murdered! His death would make Osmond Earl of Armine! What, if maddened by her cruel coquetry, jealousy, wild passion, he—but, no! no! no! Osmond doted on little Marmaduke—Osmond could not bear to hurt a fly!”

She rose, and tried to dress herself, in order to go to him; but as she did so, a deadly faintness stole over her frame. The letter fluttered to the floor, and, a few minutes later, Lady Armine, Dyddy, the servants, and a constable, who had been hastily sent for, found her in a dead swoon on the turret floor, and the constable was the first to perceive the blood-stained letter, which he picked up, and, in spite of Lady Armine's wish to look at it, put it in his pocket, as he said, to be produced hereafter.

He owed Lady Armine a grudge. He had been in her service as under-gardener, and had been by her unjustly accused of misconduct, and summarily discharged. He was glad of an opportunity of revenge. He saw, by her eager eye and outstretched hand, that she longed to get hold of the letter.

The inspector of police with a body of his men arrived at this moment, having been sent



for by the butler directly he heard that the little earl was missing. Fortunately they were on duty at the abbey, among the ruins of which a desperate crew of smugglers had hidden a cargo of spirits and tobacco.

The constable, Chubb, handed the letter to the inspector, in spite of the rage and despair which he saw flashing from Lady Armine's eyes.

There are few creatures of our race so humble or so helpless that they cannot find an opportunity of revenge, if they bide their time and watch for the chance.

But for his sense of injustice and wrong, and his long smouldering vengeance, constable Chubb would at once have handed the letter to the countess. He would not for worlds have thwarted the great lady of the castle. But as it is, Osmond Armine's letter is safe in the inspector's hands, and Lady Armine knows there is no chance of her seeing it, un-



less the dreadful suspicions of all concerned should be confirmed—the little earl proved to have been foully murdered—his body be discovered, and an inquest held on the corpse.

At that inquest Lady Armine would learn the contents of Osmond's blood-blotted letter to Juliet Rivers, but not before, for the inspector was the brother of Constable Chubbs.

The maid who waited on Juliet, and whose name was Dinah, was a very pretty pleasing young woman of five-and-twenty. She was very partial to Juliet Rivers, who was always considerate and amiable where servants were concerned. Dinah, aided by Susan, the upper housemaid, did her best to restore Juliet Rivers to life. She laid her on her bed and applied the usual remedies.

Lady Armine, without one thought or one care for the swooning Juliet, left the turret chamber to search for her son—her favourite son, Osmond. He, unable to rest while the

green-eyed monster was gnawing at his heart, had, after a few hours of vision-haunted slumber, risen, and wandered forth in the rosy dawn—the wild, ghoul-haunted marshes, the dark woods, the rugged rocks, and the open sea, being more in unison with his tormented spirit and fiercely beating heart than his downy bed, his quiet chamber, its rich carpets and costly furniture, and the stillness that pervaded Armine Castle at that early morning hour.

Osmond's unwonted absence filled Lady Armine's heart with a vague dread. She had never known him absent himself from morning prayers, which she always read herself in the dining hall at 9 A.M. It was agony unutterable to the haughty countess to see Constable and Inspector Chubb carrying their search for the missing child (living or dead) into every room and closet in Armine Castle.

The turret chamber on the ground floor

(directly under Juliet's room), that mysterious apartment, supposed by all the servants to be inhabited by a ghost, was not exempt from the necessary search. The key not being forthcoming, the door was forced open. That room had at one time belonged to Lady Armine's sister, a beautiful girl, who had lived with the countess during the first year of her married life.

Lady Olivia St. Aubyn had mortally offended her proud sister by a love match with a man very much beneath her in rank.

The Countess of Armine, when her sister's elopement and marriage was made known to her, had, in her rage and vengeance, entered that once beloved sister's room alone.

A beautiful, full-length portrait of Lady Olivia stood opposite the door. She had dashed over the sweet young face the contents of the inkstand. Every delicate glass and china ornament she had smashed. She had cut the strings of the harp and guitar, upset

the furniture—breaking all that she could. She had raked out the ashes of the grate, and in them she had buried a beautiful little alabaster statuette of Lady Olivia; while over a marble bust of her sister (life size) she had thrown a black crape veil. A skeleton of a lapdog lay on the rug—how he came by his death none could do more than guess. Books lay about the floor with their leaves torn out, sheets of music were rent in two, and worsted work unravelled. A mirror lay in glittering fragments on the floor, and on the white satin paper of the wall was written in large letters,

INGRATITUDE! TREACHERY! REVENGE!

It is probable that this room had not been entered by any one since the day when Lady Armine, in her rage and vengeance, did this work of devastation.

As the inspector and the constable exa-

mined the apartment, the former said to the latter,

“That’s her doing; what a she devil she is!”

And the other replied,

“With such a mother, and her black blood in his veins, he’d stick at nothing.”

By the expression “black blood” the inspector meant an allusion to the fact that Lady Armine’s mother was an eastern princess; and indeed her Hindoo origin was to be traced in her features.

It was a great comfort to Lady Armine, and a great surprise to the inspector, the constable, and the servants, when Osmond Armine was seen coming up the avenue to the castle.

He looked very pale and wretchedly ill, but love and jealousy are no beautifiers. Lady Armine and Daft Dyddy, who saw him from the hall windows, rushed out to meet him. Dyddy had been in meek attention on



the countess since first the little earl was missed, and he every now and then burst into fits of crying and sobbing, for which he was sharply rebuked by her stern ladyship.

When first Osmond heard of the disappearance of his little nephew, and of the blood found in the nursery and on the turret stairs, he seemed about to faint, and the inspector and the constable exchanged meaning looks, and the servants began to whisper among themselves.

Presently, however, he rallied, and said,

“Let no one rest till every room and closet in the castle, and every inch of ground on the estate, has been thoroughly searched.”

“The castle has been thoroughly searched, sir,” said Inspector Chubb.

“Well, then, now for the grounds,” said Osmond. “Dyddy, let Hubert loose.”

Hubert was Osmond’s bloodhound.

Away they went on this dreadful hunt.

Away, away!—Osmond, Daft Dyddy, Inspector and Constable Chubb; then came the male servants of the castle, and, most important of all on this ghastly occasion, Hubert, the large, thorough-bred, beautiful bloodhound. They hurried across the lovely gardens, through the shrubberies, athwart the park; they entered every arbour and summer-house, they left no nook unexplored. It was quite clear the little earl was nowhere near the castle, so they resolved to cross the beach between the castle and the abbey ruins; and as they examined the latter, Hubert began to grow excited, to bark, to howl, and to keep his nose on the ground smelling and snuffing, whining and yelping at a place where a sort of trap-door seemed to lead to some kind of cellar.

“Hubert has found out something,” said Osmond, lividly pale, while the men raised the trap-door. Some steps then appeared—stone

steps, slimy and broken. The policemen had bull's-eye lanterns—they were needed now. The cellar was dark as Erebus. On went Hubert until he came to a sort of bin, where, doubtless, in the olden time, the Father Abbot's choicest wine was kept. He dashed in, and—horror of horrors!—reappeared, lugging out part of a blood-stained sheet and blanket, and the inspector took from their ensanguined folds the murdered body of the little earl. A hideous gash across the throat, and which had very nearly severed the beautiful head from the little cherub's body, had caused the child's death.

Osmond, as he gazed at the corpse, staggered back, and would have fallen but for Dyddy, who was sobbing like a child, and who caught him in his arms. The only creature who was not transfixed with horror was Hubert, who seemed very much delighted with his success.



The body was at once conveyed to the castle, where the coroner's inquest was to sit upon it the next day but one.

Of the horror that mysterious and cruel murder caused, not only in the village of Armine, but throughout the country, no pen can convey an idea; but we will avail ourselves of the interval between the finding of the body and the coroner's inquest to take a retrospective glance at the state of affairs just before the dreadful crime was committed, and thus enable our readers to form their own opinion as to the correctness of the general impression, that the person most to be benefited by the little earl's death, namely, Osmond Armine, was his cold-blooded, relentless murderer.

## CHAPTER III.

"A ladies' school! and pray what may be taught?  
How snares are spread, and heedless lovers caught!  
Here every female art by turns is tried—  
And schools are hotbeds for the growth of pride."

A WEEK before the terrible event we have recorded, Juliet Rivers was still a pupil at Hyde Park House. The Midsummer vacation was at hand. All the boarding-schools of every grade were breaking-up. All the pupils—ay, and the poor teachers, too—were in a fever of anticipation and delight. Liberty, emancipation, return to kind friends! who that has known what the approach of the vacation is to pupil or teacher, can ever forget the rapture of the heart as the last day arrives?

Juliet Rivers, beautiful, high-spirited, and joyous, was then head pupil at Hyde Park House, and orphan ward of the late Lord Armine, of Armine Castle. She was among those most passionately impatient for the breaking-up. She was to go at once to Armine Castle, and to return no more to Hyde Park House. But why was Juliet Rivers so wild with joy?

At Hyde Park House all was life, elegance, fashion, frolic! The ladies' principals, Mesdames Bellairs and Bouton, kept an elegant equipage, and a well-mounted establishment for the young daughters of rank, wealth, and fashion, confided to their "more than maternal" care. They went out with their pupils a good deal, and "received" frequently.

Juliet was very popular, and had her "dearests," and her "darlings," and "loves," and "pets," among her schoolfellows. Why, then, is she so glad to return to that gloomy

old castle on the wild sea-coast, rendered more dismal still by the hatchment of the late lord, her guardian, now displayed above the Norman arch of its chief entrance?

Mesdames, the ladies principals of Hyde Park House, are all flattery and artificial flowers; they have pliant features, supple forms, soft sweeping dresses of chameleon silk, oily tongues, velvet shoes, and soft hands.

Lady Armine, widow of Juliet's noble guardian, is a stern, cold, haughty woman of sixty. She is a rigid disciplinarian. She had been the tyrant of Juliet's childhood, as that of her own children. She was gloomy as a wife; even as a bride, she must have been a kill-joy—and now she has been nearly a year a widow. Not a hair is allowed to peep out from under the crimped border of her widow's cap. That cap, so trying even to a fair young face, makes her features look

doubly sharp, her complexion terribly sallow. She scorns hoops, and contemns crinoline ; and her long, black silk or Paramatta "gowns," half wound with crape, mount to her very chin, and her white crape collar and cuffs—weepers, as they are called—add to the funereal effect of her appearance. Lady Armine looked as if she never *had* been young, never could have been a rosy child, or a laughing girl.

One could not imagine that a bridal wreath could ever have adorned that sallow brow—that April tears had ever dropped from that cold, dry eye, or that blushes and dimples had lent charms to those pale, hollow cheeks ; and yet she had been lovely and loving. She had felt intensely, and loved passionately, and she had suffered unutterably. Who that has loved, has not ? She had shed those tears of disappointed love which spring from the very depths of woman's heart, and

have in them a petrifying poison. They had turned Lady Armine to stone!

She had, in spite of her leanness and Hindu hue, the remains of great personal beauty—but it was the beauty of a Medusa. Like the tears she had shed so copiously in her youth, her face had a petrifying power. If a ray of feeling sometimes played over those rigid features, like moonlight on a marble statue, it was only when she looked at her son Osmond.

Never had Juliet Rivers, even in her beautiful, touching orphaned childhood, obtained one of those rare smiles. Why, then, did Juliet so long to be at Armine Castle once more? Because Osmond Armine was there! He was three years her senior, and he had been her playmate in childhood, and her “sweetheart,” as the maids at Armine said, when the hearts of the maiden and the youth began to flutter with a new and delightful

sensation, to which neither could give a name.

Lady Armine had no daughter. She had three sons, for whom she had a tutor, and for a time Juliet was one of his pupils ; but when she required masters to perfect her in music, dancing, singing, and other feminine accomplishments, as there were no "professors" of those arts within many miles of Armine, it was decided to send her to Hyde Park House. Lady Armine was not sorry to get rid of Juliet.

Juliet Rivers was only the daughter of a merchant, who had been a great friend of Lord Armine's. She had only a moderate fortune, and Lady Armine, intensely proud, and herself a peer's daughter, wished her sons to look much higher than her husband's lovely ward.

Still, she could not propose to her to stay at Hyde Park House after she had completed

her seventeenth year. And Osmond, having passed the susceptible season of his teens, and having become studious, silent, sedate, and reserved, she hoped the peril was past, and that Juliet, gay, sportive, and coquettish, would not be so dangerously attractive to Osmond.

Juliet, who had always corresponded with Osmond, had written to announce the approach of the breaking-up, and had frequently invited Osmond, and Osmond's "poor cousin," Dydimus Armine, to the ball at Hyde Park House, which was to take place the night before the young ladies left school for the holidays. Each pupil had the privilege of inviting four of her friends, and as Juliet was a great favourite, she might have invited a dozen, had she wished to do so.

Osmond Armine—all reserved and sedate, as he seemed—felt his heart bound at the thought of going to a ball at Hyde Park House. He



confided the invitation which kind Juliet had extended to the poor cousin, to no one but Dydimus. The two young men were going to spend a few days at a country-seat in the neighbourhood, and thence, as Osmond said to his cousin, they would go up to town on the sly, and would appear at Juliet's ball.

"Oh! won't it be delightful, Dyddy!" said Osmond; "and won't Juliet be surprised and pleased to see us!"

"She will to see you! And it will be delightful to me to see you enjoy yourself, Osmond," said Dyddy, very meekly; "but Juliet does not care about me, and I cannot dance, and a lame chap cuts a sorry figure in a ball-room; but I'll go, Osmond, for the pleasure of seeing you cut out all the London swells!"

Poor Dyddy was the orphan, and it was rumoured illegitimate son, of the Hon. Dydimus Armine, the late lord's brother—that brother had died (all honourable as he was)

insolvent, and had left a woman of humble birth, who had borne his name, but whom he had never introduced as his wife to any of his relations—with one boy, in a state of great poverty—Lord Armine—adopted the boy for the sake of the “auld lang syne.” His mother only visited him occasionally, and ere long she married a tradesman.

Dydddy—poor fellow!—had suffered severely in his childhood from infant paralysis—at one time his speech and his intellect were seriously affected, and one foot and leg were crippled. As he grew up, although there was always something odd about him, his lameness was the only very serious consequence of his infantile disorder. But he had strange and nervous twitchings of the facial muscles; an odd way of rolling his very light prominent eyes, and a thousand curious, disagreeable, and irritating tricks and habits peculiar to himself.

In the village, where, taking their tone from the Castle, Dydimus was not much respected or esteemed, he went by the name of "Daft Dyddy," and much as that nickname enraged him (for he was at times very excitable), even Juliet would occasionally torment him by calling him "Daft Dyddy."

As to Lady Armine, she despised, hated, and cruelly oppressed him. She had opposed Lord Armine's adopting him. She had never felt certain that he was not illegitimate, and she often spoke to him and treated him like a menial; sent him on errands, and made him do things which are generally the work of a page. All this "Daft Dyddy" bore with meek smiles and ready compliance.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lady Armine had been fortunate in procuring for Juliet Rivers, on her journey from London to Armine Castle, the chaperonage of the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Ducane. He was the Vicar of

Armine, and she was his helpmeet. They were in London for a few days, because the vicar wished to insure his life for the benefit of his wife. They called to offer Juliet their protection, and she compelled them to promise to come to the ball. When the simple worthy old clerical pair accepted Juliet's invitation to that breaking-up ball, at her school, they little dreamt what a grand and stylish affair a school-ball could be.

The first guests to arrive at the ball were the old vicar and his wife. They understood but little of London fashions and London late hours, and, as on the card Juliet had given them nine o'clock was written, they thought to show their friendship for Juliet, and respect for the ladies' principal, by driving up to the entrance of Hyde Park House a little before nine.

As their humble little street-cab stopped at the door, they were surprised to see an awn-

ing, which had been erected to protect the ladies as they stepped from their carriages into the hall, and to find a little mob of outsiders already assembled.

Mr. and Mrs. Ducane were of gentle birth, and had a good deal of quiet inward dignity, but their exterior was very humble, and slightly rustic. An old clergyman, in his black suit, and white tie, can pass muster anywhere ; but Mrs. Ducane, in a grey silk poplin, which for thirty years had been her Sunday-best, and kept in lavender, was, as one of the hired waiters said to another, "A hobsolete hold hobject, straight hout of Nohar's hark."

The ladies' principal were still at their toilets, and so were all the pupils and teachers, when the vicar and his wife were shewn into the reception-rooms. Never had those splendid pier-glasses reflected such a quaint old figure as Mrs. Ducane, as she sat

down before a table, covered with engravings and caricatures, and the vicar took his stand on the rug, with his back to the handsome grate, filled with hothouse plants. Mrs. Ducane's white blonde cap was tied under her chin with broad white satin ribbon, and was profusely trimmed with bows of the same. A white blonde tippet, and a pair of white kid gloves, formed her idea of full-dress. The former was secured by a pearl brooch, in the centre of which was a crystal slab, containing a bit of the vicar's hair, as it had been five-and-thirty years before. *Gigôt* sleeves, a short waist, a broad back, and a scanty skirt, *sans* crinoline, and showing her ankles, and a pair of bronze sandalled shoes, completed her costume.

When Juliet heard that a very "hobsolete hold couple" had arrived, she guessed who they were, and hurried down to receive them. Osmond Armine and Daft Dyddy were an-

nounced soon after. Osmond was in love; and your lover's watch always gains; it is set by his heart. Soon after, drawing on their white kid gloves, and gently touching their long spiky noses with their richly-trimmed, scented handkerchiefs, the ladies' principals came, smiling and bowing, into the reception-rooms.

At ten o'clock the company began to arrive. The pupils were all dressed alike, in white tulle, over white silk—wreaths of white roses and jasmine; bouquets of the same, and a blue and silver rosette on the left breast, to distinguish them as pupils of Hyde Park House. During the first two hours, the young ladies, under the superintendence of the dancing-master, exhibited fancy dances. Then the supper-room was thrown open, and, after supper, the company mingled in the dance. Osmond led away the brilliant Juliet, and poor Dyddy followed her with his eyes,

and felt much honoured by being allowed to hold her fan and her bouquet. There were, perhaps, finer women, and more regularly beautiful girls at that ball, but for charm, brilliancy, and captivation, none there approached Juliet Rivers. Unluckily, she was vain, thoughtless, fond of universal conquest, and loved to show her power, and to trifle with the hearts she won. She even smiled, with her bright, irresistible smile on Daft Dyddy, whom she saw there, gazing at her as a devotee might do at the sudden apparition of the Madonna.

This evening was, of course, one of great triumph to Juliet; but this we must say in her favour, that, while surrounded by young sprigs of rank and fashion (attachés and guardsmen), she never forgot to see that the vicar and his wife had every possible attention paid to them. She playfully commanded a young lord, who was evidently smitten with



her, to take her dear old friend, Mrs. Ducane, down to supper. The handsome young Dundreary, brother of one of the most high-born and exclusive of Juliet's schoolfellows (the Lady Ada de Vere), completely under the influence of Juliet, and his passion for her, sidled up to the quaint old vicar, and actually offered his arm to escort her to the supper-room.

This young nobleman, Viscount Castleville, eldest son of the Earl of Beaumaris, had recently matriculated at Oxford, and his father, himself a good scholar, and a great admirer of scholarship, was very anxious that his eldest son should graduate in honours. The young Castleville was not deficient in talent and ambition—he had been brought up at Eton, and only seemed a fool when he aped the Dundreary.

He soon discovered that the vicar and his quaint old wife were neighbours of his idol.

Mr. Ducane occasionally took a pupil to prepare for honours, or to read with him during the vacation. He was a class man. Lord Castleville wanted to read with a private tutor. Here was a chance! At the vicarage he should be in the immediate neighbourhood of Juliet Rivers. He should see her, perhaps, daily—walk with her, ride with her—possibly win her love. He asked Mrs. Ducane to introduce him to her husband—he threw aside his coxcombry, and entered on the subject next his heart. The result the reader already knows.

Juliet was not a little proud of the admiration and exclusive attentions of young Lord Castleville. All her schoolfellows envied her. Osmond grew desperately jealous. Daft Dyddy sympathised with him warmly and tenderly—"a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." The evening that had begun so brightly, so happily, ended in gloom and

distress. A lover's quarrel had begun. Osmond spoke harshly, bitterly, to Juliet, for dancing twice running with Lord Castleville, and she resented his doing so—said she had given no one any right to censure her actions, and, if even she did, it would be some one to whom she could look up.

“And you could look up to a coxcomb, if he had a title, Juliet?” said Osmond, deadly pale, and tears in his eyes and in his voice.

“I am no radical,” she said, provokingly, “and when a nobleman is estimable and charming, I like him all the better for being a nobleman ; but when he is contrasted with a rude, surly, fault-finding commoner, he gains immensely, in my opinion.”

“Juliet, if this Castleville had no title, should you like him?”

“Yes ; but he has a title, not one only, he has every title to my esteem. All my friends here admire him. Lady Ada's brother has

long been the secret unseen idol of Hyde Park House. You know every woman would prefer being 'My Lady' to plain *Mrs.*—just like the wife of a grocer or baker. Oh! 'My Lady' has a very bewitching sound!" laughed the thoughtless tormentor.

Osmond silently withdrew. Dyddy hurried after him. Osmond was very, very, miserable—passionately in love, and madly jealous. Reader, if you are in love with a coquette, who has made you wildly jealous, you can imagine the sort of night the Hon. Osmond Armine spent after that ball at Hyde Park House. Daft Dyddy tried to comfort, but only exasperated him. There is no comfort for the jealous. Dyddy, who was very handy (Lady Armine had trained him to be so), made Osmond some tea and buttered toast. Osmond would touch neither. He rushed up into his own room, and locked himself in. It was thus that sprung to life in Osmond's heart

that jealousy to which the world in general ascribed the mysterious child-murder at Armine Castle.

The young men, Osmond and Dyddy, completed their visit to their friends in the country, and when they returned to Armine Castle, Juliet Rivers was there, and Lord Castleville was located at the vicarage as a pupil.

## CHAPTER IV.

"Murder most foul! as at the best it is,  
But this most foul, base, and unnatural."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE coroner's inquest sat upon the murdered body of the infant Marmaduke, Earl of Armine. It was in the antique dining-hall of the Castle that the terrible inquiry took place. The little body lay on the table covered with a fine white sheet, but through that sheet the sharp outline of the once round, soft features, now pinched and contracted by Death, could be traced.

Lady Armine, deadly pale, and looking stern and resentful, sat in an old carved oaken arm-chair. Dyddy was by her side, in

close attendance on her. The jury had viewed the body. The surgeon had made a post-mortem examination, and had decided that the wound across the throat had caused almost instantaneous death. The witnesses examined were, Juliet Rivers, Osmond Armine, Beagle (the child's nurse); Lady Armine, and all those who had been present at the finding of the body.

The vicar and his wife were there, and so was young Lord Castleville, who kept his eyeglass in a dull eye, which was fixed on Juliet. Osmond, very pale, stood with his arms folded across his chest, mournfully gazing at the white, beautiful face and drooping form of his heart's idol. Osmond's blood-stained letter lay on a table before the foreman of the jury.

Juliet was the first witness examined, and to the question, "Had she, or had she *not*, heard a footstep on the stair in the night or morning of the murder?" she

could only answer with her tears and sobs.

The jury had been told by the inspector, that the turret stairs were very old and creaking, and that no man could ascend or descend them unheard, by anyone awake, at the time, in any of the turret rooms. Cross-examination elicited that Juliet *had* heard "a foot-step on the stair on the night of the murder;" that she had recognised it as Osmond Armine's.

She looked up; she saw the agony of Lady Armine's face, the deep sorrow of Osmond's expression, the distrust, the suspicion, and the horror of all present, and which she read in the averted glance of the servants, and the stern, searching question of the foreman of the jury. Perceiving all this, Juliet suddenly dried her eyes.

She rose from her seat. A crimson flush stole over her face, and, clasping her hands, she said,



“It *is* true that I *did* hear Osmond Armine’s footstep on the stair. I heard him, for I was very wakeful. I heard him ascend the stairs and stop at the door of my room ; but I swear, as I hope for salvation, that having thrust a note under my door, he re-descended the winding stair ! And I swear, in the presence of my Saviour, and I call him to witness to the truth of what I say, Osmond Armine did not ascend the steps that lead to the nursery” (here her voice faltered), “but went slowly down, and I listened until I heard him open the door on the ground-floor, and close it again !”

Juliet’s important statement produced a visible effect on all present. She had spoken as even an accomplished actress was never known to speak—as none could speak but a devoted woman bearing witness to the truth. She had, as it seemed to all present, suddenly changed from a weak, wail-

ing, weeping, drooping girl, to a brave, high-souled, heroic woman. She looked as Boadicea might have looked in her youth, and when she loved. From a lily beaten by the storm she had suddenly, by the spell of the arch-enchanter LOVE, become a she-Ajax, defying the lightning—the lightning that darted from the large dark Hindoo-eyes of the Countess of Armine.

She was always lovely, graceful, pretty (sometimes even beautiful), but now she was superb. Her fine eyes seemed ablaze with a flame kindled at the pure vestal fire in her young heart. Her cheek was flushed. Her bosom heaved. Her white hands were tightly clasped. Every eye was fixed on this sublime being, whom true love had thus changed, as by magic, from a vain trifler to a heroine, a martyr. Many eyes grew moist with tears as they gazed on Juliet Rivers. They had been very cold and scrutinising in their

glances before. But at this moment the constable whispered to the inspector, and the inspector whispered to the foreman—who, taking up Osmond Armine's blood-stained letter, said—

“Is this the letter which was thrust under your door last night?”

“It is,” faltered Juliet, again growing deadly pale; “at least, not last night, but this morning, at 2 A.M.”

“How do you happen to know the exact hour at which you heard the footstep on the stair, madam?” said the foreman, struck with sudden respect for the devoted woman, whom a few minutes before he had looked upon as a flighty, frivolous girl.

“Mr. Armine's bloodhound was howling under my window,” said Juliet (here many of them present glanced at each other with superstitious horror), “an owl was screeching, and a bat was flapping at my casement.

These dreary and ominous sounds disturbed me. I could not sleep, and just as the tower clock struck two, I heard a footstep on the stair, and a moment later I saw a letter thrust under my door."

"Did anyone knock at your door, madam, or speak to you?" asked the foreman.

"No; the next moment I heard the footsteps re-descend the stair."

"When did you read that letter?"

"I rose immediately, intending to do so at once; but before I reached the door, my night-light went out."

"Then the note remained at the door?"

"No—I groped for it in the dark."

"But if it was dark, you could not read it."

"No; I did not read it till after."

Here Juliet's voice failed her; she sank into her chair, and wept bitterly.

"I am sorry to distress you, madam," said

the foreman, "but do you mean that you did not read this letter till after the murder was discovered?"

"I did not read it," said Juliet, dashing away her tears, "till after—the darling child was missed. I slept heavily until I heard the shrieks and cries of Beagle, the nurse. I rushed upstairs to inquire what was the matter. I found Beagle in great alarm—the cot empty—stains of blood—on the carpet—and on the stairs—Beagle rushed downstairs, shrieking murder—and I, being barefooted and in my wrapper, returned to my own room to dress myself. I found the letter on the floor of my room."

"Blood-stained as it is now—was it not, madam?"

"It was."

"After you had read it, you fainted, I believe?"

"I believe I did."

One of the jury here requested that the letter might be read aloud.

"Oh! no! no! no!" cried Juliet, again starting to her feet.

But the letter was read all the same. How else could the jury form any opinion of its importance, and of its bearing upon the terrible question at issue? The reader is already acquainted with the contents of that fatal letter.

How torturing was it to Osmond—how maddening to Juliet—to hear that passionate outpouring of a jealous lover's heart coldly read by a common-place man, in a harsh voice and with a nasal twang. The impression that letter conveyed to the minds of the jury was but too evident. The words "*be my lady,*" "*be a Countess,*" admitted (in their opinion) of but one interpretation. Followed by the expression, "If *you* are happy, no matter what dreadful fate may be the position of Osmond Armine," it conveyed (to almost all present)

the conviction that, driven mad by jealousy, by Juliet's taunts, and by the preference she had so cruelly expressed for rank and precedence (in the person of Lord Castleville), Osmond had resolved to risk his life in this world and his soul in the next, in order to be able *himself* to give to the object of his insane devotion the rank and title she so coveted.

Love is a brief madness. Madness can neither reason nor calculate. The little lord asleep in his cot, and guarded only by a nurse who was suspected of a devoted secret worship of the evil spirit Gin ; he, asleep in his cot, was the only barrier to Osmond Armine being himself the Earl of Armine. He did not pause to consider how probable, how almost inevitable was the prompt detection that must at once frustrate his guilty scheme. All he saw was, himself a peer of the realm—himself in a position at once to make his ambitious idol a countess—to place her at the head of

a goodly establishment, both in town and country. She, as his wife, would be the mistress of Armine Castle, and of Armine House in Grosvenor Square. Lady Armine would be only the Dowager, and the old Dower House, near Exeter, would be her proper abode in future. Maddened at once by love and jealousy, he had but that one object—Juliet. True (urged the jury), he *did* glance at the possibility of his being overtaken by retributive justice when he said, “Be a peeress—be my lady—if you are happy I care not what dreadful fate may be the portion of Osmond Armine!”

There was but one interpretation that could be put by rational beings on these words: it was thus the jury reasoned.

Juliet sank, half fainting, on her chair.

Osmond Armine was about to speak, when suddenly Lady Armine, whose dark, handsome, Hindoo features had been working convulsively



for some time, started to her feet, and cried, in a voice of unutterable agony and despair—a mother's wild despair—

“Osmond, my son, I am ready to pledge my eternal soul that you are innocent of this foul deed! Men!—men!—men!” she cried, frantically addressing the jury, “you who are sitting in judgment on him—you do not know him. I, his mother—I, who nursed him at this now distracted breast—I, who have seldom parted from him—I, who presided at his education in his infancy, childhood, and boyhood—I, who know him as none but a mother can know a son—I swear to you that he is the soul of honour and of mercy—brave as a lion, gentle as a dove, true and pure as the angels are! I swear to you, by all my hopes of Heaven, this treacherous, cruel deed was not done by him! Look at him! Is that the face, is that the bearing of a murderer? Ah, ah!” she cried, almost with a

scream, "a light breaks in upon my brain. I will tell you who has done, and must have done, this deed of blood and crime. It is not Osmond Armine, descended, as he is, on his father's side and mine, from a true-honoured race—he in whose noble veins flows the same pure and ancient blood that a few hours ago warmed the breast of the murdered infant! No! the Armines are incapable of a base crime; so are the St. Aubyns; but that creature, cowering there before the calm gaze of the man whom she sees in peril of death, and worse still, infamy, for her crime—she, whose vile coquetry in encouraging a brainless fop" (here Lord Castleville shifted his eye-glass, to bring it to bear on Lady Armine), "I repeat, to encourage a brainless fop, brought my noble son to her plebeian feet—she who, aspiring, ambitious, vain and vile, had the most to gain by my grandson's death—she must have done this cruel, treacherous, and foul murder!"

"No, no, no!" shrieked Juliet, "Osmond is innocent; I am innocent! Gentlemen of the jury, do not believe that I could ever have harmed the cherub child I would have died to save!" Convulsive sobs here choked Juliet's utterance.

"Mother," cried Osmond, "how can you—how dare you—accuse Juliet Rivers?"

"Silence, boy!" cried Lady Armine. "I say what I believe, so help me Heaven, will prove to be true!"

"Forbear, mother, forbear!" cried Osmond, "she is an angel of goodness."

"Ay, so the mariner thinks of the syren, till he follows her to destruction. Silence, fool—rash, mad, intoxicated fool! Gentlemen, it has come out in the evidence, that although the under sheet and blanket of the child's bed were gone from his cot, his little bed itself was made up as neatly as if he had not been in it that night. A man could not

have done that ; or, at least, only one accustomed to such work, while every girl who has been in the habit of putting her doll to bed could have done it easily. Again, who had such easy access to the nursery as that syren hypocrite ?”

“No, no, gentlemen, I am no syren, no hypocrite,” replied Juliet.

Osmond rushed to her side, and whispered words of comfort in her ear, then turning to the jury, he said,

“Lady Armine is prejudiced against Miss Rivers. Gentlemen, bear that in mind, I implore you.”

“Prejudiced !” cried the countess ; “no, I am the only person present *not* prejudiced in that black tigress’s favour ; not deceived by her false fawning. See you not,” she added, “you, men, who perhaps believe that because she is young, and soft, and winning, and, in the opinion of some, handsome, she could not

have shed an infant's blood ! Why, the annals of crime (if you have studied them as I have), would convince you that the most desperate deeds of blood and violence have been done by the young and fair of the (so-called) gentle sex ! If, in all times, young girls have murdered their own children to conceal their shame, why should Juliet Rivers hesitate to kill that infant, who was the only barrier between herself and the station, the position, the coronet, which have been the object of all her schemes and wiles ? This footstep on the stair is a very plausible story, but I do not believe one word of it. I do believe that my son, maddened by her coquetry and captivated by her blandishments, was madly jealous of the silly coxcomb whose person and manners this girl pretended to admire ; while all she did care for in him was his title and his expectations. I believe my son did write that note. I dare-say he gave it to Juliet Rivers in the course

of the evening, not at two in the morning, as she has falsely sworn ; but I construe its meaning thus—‘ Be my lady, be a peeress ’—that is, ‘ Marry this titled noodle whom you have intoxicated, and if you are happy, no matter what is in store for me.’ Ponder on the probability of what I now suggest, gentlemen, and return your verdict accordingly ; but whatever that verdict may be, I feel certain that, should this unparalleled case be sent to the assizes, and my good and noble son be tried for this foul murder, he must and will be acquitted, for I call God to witness, there is no one in this room more innocent of this base deed than he is !”

As Lady Armine concluded this long and vehement harangue, a deadly faintness stole over her frame, and she would have fallen to the ground, had not Daft Dyddy rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

The rank of the countess, and the general

respect and awe which this terrible woman inspired, had induced the jury to hear her patiently to the end of her speech. She had not, however, succeeded in diverting one iota of suspicion from her son to Juliet.

Indeed, as she proceeded to accuse the young girl, who had made so favourable an impression upon the jury, every brow darkened. Glances of impatience, derision, and even indignation, were exchanged. And when at length she fell back in Dyddy's arms, almost insensible, some further investigation took place.

Beagle, the nurse, was severely cross-examined.

A search was proposed, and wisely, too, for the clothes of the murderer, for it was certain that as the blood of the little victim had stained the nursery carpets and trickled down the turret stairs, the clothes of the assassin could not have escaped. These must, some-

where (at least, so an intelligent juryman remarked), be hidden with the blood-stained garments in which the butcher had done this work of blood and crime.

Mrs. Beagle, a middle-aged woman, who had some remains of beauty, but who had an evil eye, and a coaxing voice, and a plausible manner, contradicted herself several times in the cross-examination. Beagle was the creature who had betrayed her unhappy mistress. The result of the cross-examination went to prove that she and some of the other servants, with a few friends, among others her "young man," had agreed, after the family were in bed, to "make a night of it." It was not clear that she had been in bed at all, but it seemed probable that it was when she left the orgies downstairs, and hastened, half-seas-over, to her own room, fearing the little earl might wake and miss her, that she first discovered that the child was missing.



This startling revelation produced a great effect on the jury ; and, as it was getting late, and the clothes had yet to be sought for and found, it was decided to adjourn the inquest till the next day. The police were left in the house to take charge of the corpse, and to see that no one went out.


Lady Armine, who was by this time seriously ill, with symptoms that indicated the first stage of brain fever, was obliged to retire to her room, and to her bed, where the family doctor soon attended her, and, by the powerful aid of morphia, lulled to sleep at once her anguish and her rage.

Juliet, too, was very ill, and Dinah kindly offered to make up a bed on the sofa in her turret chamber, observing that, "as Mrs. Beagle had declared she could never set foot on the turret stairs again, and was going to sleep with the housekeeper for company, Miss Juliet would be all alone in the tower, and

there was no knowing what she might see, or what noises she might hear." She therefore insisted on bearing Juliet company, and her sympathy and kindness were a positive blessing to the lonely and almost heart-broken girl.

As for Osmond Armine, he paced up and down his chamber till dawn. He then, wearied alike in body and mind, threw himself on his bed and slept.

Daft Dyddy, afraid to lie alone in his remote little room, had begged leave to pass the night in an arm-chair in Osmond's dressing-room. And all this time the policemen guarded the Castle, and watched its inmates. Moving about from door to door, and refreshing themselves occasionally with the cold beef and pickles, and bread and cheese and beer, placed at their disposal, they were unmoved, though the sultry night had ended in a summer storm. They had no fear, although the thunder



roared, and blew a hurricane, the forked lightning flashed, and lighted up the antique hall and that white sheet, beneath which lay the murdered body of the little earl, awaiting the morrow and its adjourned inquest.

## CHAPTER V.

“Far be that thought to think you are forsaken,  
Gods and good men shall make of you still their care.”

ULYSSES.

EVERY possible effort was made by the police to discover the weapon with which the murder had been done, and the blood-stained clothes which the assassin had worn in doing it. Two celebrated London detectives had arrived, and were actively engaged in the search. The inquest was postponed from day to day, but in vain. At length it was decided to hold the adjourned inquest, for it became necessary to inter the murdered child. At the same time the search was continued, and the mystery attending this dreadful murder

was intensified by the extraordinary fact that the weapon and the murderer's clothes could not be discovered, although detectives Hunt and Finnis had devoted all their energies and experience to the search.

There was, however, one circumstance which tended to increase the universal impression of Osmond Armine's guilt; that circumstance was, that a bit of a thin blue cloth (part of a summer-coat which Osmond occasionally wore), was found by detective Hunt in a sort of thicket that led to the ruins where the body was found. There was a path of soft mould that went right through this wild shrubbery or fold. It had not long been made, and the earth had not yet hardened. There were faint indications of footsteps along that path. Detective Hunt kept his own counsel, and possessed himself of a boot of Osmond Armine's. He was very much elated when he discovered that the print on the soft earth corresponded

with the shape of the sole of Osmond Armine's boot. The summer-coat, of which a little fragment caught detective Hunt's quick eye, having been caught by a whitethorn bush, and the footsteps on the way to the abbey, were (though trifles in themselves) of deadly weight in the evidence against Osmond.

In spite of Lady Armine's rage and despair—in spite of Juliet's tears, and Osmond's calm and proud denial of the dreadful crime—the jury returned a verdict of “WILFUL MURDER against Osmond Armine.” When Lady Armine heard the verdict, the strong-minded, Medusa-faced, marble-hearted, iron-nerved countess, proved but a weak woman and fond mother after all, and went into violent hysterics. Juliet sank in a dead swoon on the floor, and Daft Dyddy sobbed aloud.

It is wonderful how easily people adopt the entire belief in the guilt of a fellow-creature,

if once a sufficient motive is suggested. The more romantic that motive, the more ready are they to believe in the guilt. The servant at the Castle, the inhabitants at the little village of Armine, the jurymen, and even Sir Denbigh Blake, the magistrate before whom Osmond was taken, had all known him from his boyhood. It is probable that they, one and all, if they had been asked to point out the most noble-hearted, generous, and merciful young man of their acquaintance, would have fixed on Osmond Armine. Yet no one doubted the justice of the verdict. Many, the women especially, when they saw him stand so firm, and look so noble, as they said, declared that Miss Rivers, who had driven him wild by her coquetry, was more to blame even than he was, and ought to be hanged by his side. Even they, however, never doubted of his guilt, but the crimes that arose from passionate love are always

palliated by a sex that lives only to be loved. For this reason *Othello*, the most savage murderer, and *Claude Melnotte*, the greatest liar and cheat on record, are (because idolatrised love led them to sin) the most popular of our fictitious heroes.

At the close of the adjourned inquest (and it was getting late and dark when the verdict was found) Lady Armine was shrieking, laughing, and screaming, in the arms of the terrified attendant, who vainly tried to hold her.

Dinah was doing her utmost for poor Juliet. Osmond was in custody—and was to be taken before Sir Denbigh Blake the next day, and Mrs. Beagle was requested by the foreman of the jury to prepare the little earl's remains for interment, and to watch by them until the undertaker arrived with the coffin.

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On the last night that the body of Marmaduke, Earl of Armine (*ætat* four years), was



to remain above ground, the news of the possible and mysterious child murder at Armine Castle came, through the medium of the weekly county paper, to the knowledge of a lady who for some time past had been lodging at a remote old manor-house of ancient times.

This quaint old building with its gables, its mullion windows, its high roof, curious carving in wood and stone, and its huge oaken beams or rafters, was situated at the further extremity of the marsh to which we have alluded. It was the only house for many miles round, where apartments of any size were to be found.

In the village of Armine the cottages were all the same small, dark, smoky, inconvenient hovels, which had lodged the ancestors of their present inhabitants. The Marsh Manor-House, on the contrary, had some tolerably great rooms, very low-pitched, but that was the

custom in manor-houses of three hundred years ago. It was the only place in the neighbourhood that did not belong to the Armine family, and the late earl and his father and grandfather had vainly tried to purchase it.

The gentleman to whom it belonged, a Mr. Devereux, did not live in it. No one could remember ever to have seen him there. An old housekeeper resided there, and, with or without her master's leave, she let the first floor when she could get a tenant—which was very rarely. She had occasionally had a sportsman or two there, for there was excellent snipe-shooting; but the mysterious lady who had suddenly taken the lodgings, was the only one who had ever been located there for many years. The old housekeeper was all but blind, and her niece who waited on her was deaf.

Every fortnight this young woman went to the market-town nearest to the Marsh Manor,

to purchase whatever was required for the household, and she always brought back with her the current number of the county paper. The deaf niece generally read every word of this paper, advertisements and all, to the blind aunt. But on her return from market with her *Weekly Courant*, the deaf niece, during the lady-lodger's stay, thought it only polite and proper to offer the first perusal of the paper to the lady lodger.

The lady-lodger was a very silent, reserved person ; but if she had been a great talker, Dorcas could not have heard a word she said. Nor could she see much of the lady's face, for she wore a hood of black silk, with a lace fall to shade her eyes. Her form seemed very elegant, tall and slender, but its actual outline was concealed by a large black paletot, deeply trimmed with crape. She was in very deep mourning, and Dorcas noticed that her hands were very small and delicately white, and yet

she had no maid to wait on her, and was not hard to please. The lady-lodger had given her name as Mrs. Tempest, and the only thing she did which was not very agreeable to the blind aunt and the deaf niece, was her taking her walks at night.

“La, ma’am!” said the girl, in the loud shrill unmodulated voice of a person who cannot hear herself speak, “I do wonder, and so do my aunt, that you like to venture out so late o’ night’s by yourself. Why, it’s a wonder, ma’am, you don’t meet the Ghoul. He never shows his grim, ghastly face by day, but they say he’s out most nights a-prowling about for bats and toads, and rats and mice, and every now and then he has a regular blow-out in the churchyard. I wouldn’t run the risk of meeting him, ma’am, not for all the gold and silver in the Bank of England.”

As Dorcas was deaf, the lady wrote her answer on a slate which was placed on the

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table for that purpose. Sometimes she talked on her fingers to deaf Dorcas. She wrote then as follows :—

“ I’ve heard something of this Ghoul before, Dorcas ; does he not live in a ‘ mud ’ hovel on the moor ? ”

“ Yes, ma’am, sometimes there, and at others in a cave he’s hewn at night, with his own hands out of the rock by the sea ; and both the hut on the moor and the cave in the rock are his own freeholds—at least, so they say, that he’s bought the land out and out till the world’s end. No one knows his real history, but some people think he’s a lord or a sir, he’s been crossed in love, and some that he’s committed some great crime. And I’ve heard that he’s made a solemn vow never to sleep in a bed, or eat cooked victuals, or warm himself by a fire, or shave, have his beard or his hair cut. But that isn’t the worst part of what he does ; it’s well known he haunts the

churchyard, and grubs and grubs with his long nails, till he digs up infants' coffins out of their graves, and then I've heard say—leastways when I had my hearing—he feeds upon them. Oh! ma'am, what would you do if you met him (the Ghoul) on the moor to-night?"

"I think I should run away as fast as I could, Dorcas."

"La, ma'am, the Ghoul can outrun any man, so of course he'd soon overtake you."

"Oh! never fear, Dorcas, I can take care of myself; and now, get my tea ready. I'll just look over the paper you've brought me."

The lady settled herself as she spoke in an easy chair; Dorcas hurried away to get the tea ready. If she had not been stone deaf she would have heard before she got back into the kitchen, a long, wild, piercing shriek, nay, more than one, a succession of wild cries of anguish and despair. The next moment the

lady rushed out of the house, and sped like one pursued across the marsh.

It was moonlight—bright, silvery moonlight—the marshes, gloomy and dreary enough by day, had a sort of charm in the silver light! How lovely! how very lovely it was!

The poor lady could see nothing moving but her own spare shadow, which seemed to her excited fancy like a dark destiny which she could not shake off.

There was not a breath of air stirring, not a sound to be heard but the sob that ever and anon convulsed her breast, the wail that burst from her very heart, the cry of sharp pain which she could not suppress. Poor lady, hers is some very deep and very terrible grief.

She is so absorbed by it, that she does not see, just where she is about to cross the marsh at an angle, a hut built something like a wigwam or a beaver's hut. But a wild terror

took possession of her every sense when a very tall figure emerged from that hut, and suddenly stood before her, barring her passage and saying,

“Who is she that is bold enough to trespass on my freehold? Go back at once; this is the ground of the Ghoul.”

Very gigantic and very ghastly was the strange mysterious being who thus addressed the poor lady.

“Do not stop me, for mercy’s sake!—do not stop me!” she cried, some feeling stronger than terror conquering her fears. “Let me cross your land and I will bless you!”

“You would cross my land,” said the Ghoul; “so be it, if you will share my supper. See, I have two prime young rats—water-rats—and plenty of mice, good water from the pond, with the duckweed floating on the top. Come, ‘eat, drink and be merry;’ ’tis long since I have had a guest—come!”



Inside the hut was a rude sort of table. The Ghoul motioned to the lady to enter. He busied himself with spreading out his brace of water-rats, his dozen of mice, and water from the pond.

While his back was turned, the lady watched her opportunity. She stepped noiselessly out of the hut—a patch of underwood favoured her escape. She plunged into it, although, in doing so, she tore her garments and scratched her face, arms, and hands. Still, on she hurried, heedless of pain and of the blood that streams from her feet.

She heard the Ghoul, who did not perceive that she was gone for some little time, yelling aloud, and uttering unearthly sounds of anger and disappointment. He set out in pursuit, but the thick dark underwood concealed her from his view; and it was part of his vow not to leave his own freehold. That freehold extended to some distance; but luckily

not in the direction the lady had taken.

She went on, on, on, a long, long way, until she reached the park. She rushed across the park, and reached the Castle. There was one window partly open on the ground floor. It was the window of a room that had been a boudoir—Lady Loftus's boudoir. She looked in; the body of the murdered child, awaiting the coffin, had been removed to this room. Beagle, whose duty it was to watch the body, was drinking in the housekeeper's room. The lady gently lifted up the window, and entered the room.

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It was morning before Beagle returned to her post. Her screams brought several of the servants to the room. On the floor lay the dead body of Lady Loftus, with the murdered child clasped to her bosom.

“Parted in life, reunited in death!”

## CHAPTER VI.

"The judgment of the Heaven that makes men tremble."

SHAKSPEARE.

YES, it was Lady Loftus ! That once beautiful, brilliant woman, whose attractions and coquetry (monstrous as they had been in their effects) had certainly been blent with the most affectionate of hearts and the most generous of natures. It was now rather more than a year since she had rashly decided on quitting her home—a step no woman should ever take, unless driven to it by unworthy and unbearable ill-treatment from her husband.

No tyranny, no malignity, no enmity in her mother-in-law, can justify her in quitting that

home which, as the poet says, "is the temple of a wife's honour." Now, Lord Loftus, although he did not uphold his wife (as it is a man's duty to do whenever she is in the right), even against his own mother, had yet never behaved to her with cruelty or insult enough to justify her in leaving him. But Lady Loftus was more than half Italian. She had the large dark eyes, the rich raven tresses, the soft cream-coloured skin, the fine classic features, and the voluptuous form of Italian beauty. She had also the high spirit, the passionate nature, the ardent feelings of love and of revenge, the quick sense of kindness, the impatience of wrong and injustice, suspicion and distrust; a head to plan, and a will to act according to the dictates of revenge. The immediate cause of her departure from her husband and her home was Lady Armine's having intercepted letters from her brother to herself.

Lady Armine pretended to believe that these letters came from some Italian lover. The suspicion enraged Lady Loftus more than that meanest of all domestic treasons, the tampering with her letters. In her great indignation she appealed to her husband. He, more in awe of his mother than of his wife, dared not defend the latter against such outrage, as he should have done.

Her heart still yearned for her fond mother, and rebelled so against her lukewarm husband, and still more so against her imperious, immoral, mischief-making mother-in-law. She resolved to leave the Castle, but she never for a moment contemplated parting with her child. She had entire confidence in Beagle, and she escaped from Armine Castle to sunny Italy, and her mother's villa, near Florence.

The warm climate, and the warm hearts that welcomed Lady Loftus in Florence, formed a delightful contrast to Armine Castle, English

weather, and a mother-in-law more blighting and bitter than the east wind of our isle. But, in spite of her mother's devotion, and the warm welcome of all her friends, Corinna, Lady Loftus, was not happy away from her darling child. In a short time she became so wretched, that her mother agreed to accompany her back to England, to try to learn what had become of her idolised boy. The first English newspaper she saw on landing informed her of the death of Lord Loftus. This was a great shock to her.

We do not know what feelings lie hidden in our hearts till some dreadful bereavement breaks them. So it was with Corinna. She discovered at the same moment that she loved her husband, and that he was gone from her for ever. The death of the Earl of Armine followed quickly upon that of his son.

Lady Loftus then applied for the custody of her child through her solicitor.

The Countess of Armine's solicitor replied that Lord Loftus, the child's father, had by will appointed Lady Armine the guardian of the child, and that she would never resign so sacred a trust, especially to one who had proved too clearly that she could not take care of herself, to be trusted with the charge of the infant Earl of Armine.

Poor Corinna was in despair when she received this bitter and scornful reply. Her anguish and her remorse at having trusted her child to Beagle, instead of taking the infant treasure with her, caused her a very severe and very painful and protracted illness. When barely convalescent, she resolved to go at once in secret and quite *incog.* into the neighbourhood of Armine Castle.

She remembered the Marsh Manor-House, where a sporting friend of the Armine family had once been lodged. Here she resolved to take up her abode, and to watch her oppor-

tunity of at least seeing her darling. She had even formed several not very feasible schemes for carrying him off. It was here, too, that she was to learn, through Dorcas's newspaper, of the dreadful and mysterious murder of her darling.

We have witnessed her anguish, her despair, and we know that, owing to the faithlessness of the traitor Beagle, and that person's convivial propensities, the mother once more beheld her child. Of the unutterable anguish of that meeting there were no spectators. But we must suppose that the mother's heart broke when she beheld her murdered darling. She must have died with her boy in her arms, and we may hope that their spirits are re-united in a world of love and bliss.

Beagle was the first to recognise the mistress whom she had betrayed, deceived, destroyed. Beagle was a very bad, unprincipled woman, but a pang of remorse shot through



even her hardened heart when she beheld the wreck she had made.

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Osmond Armine, on the coroner's warrant, had been taken before Sir Denbigh Blake, and after an examination something similar to that he had undergone before the coroner, he had been committed to Exeter jail, there to await the assizes and his own trial for the artful murder of the infant Marmaduke, Earl of Armine !

Lady Armine at this dreadful time was lying unconscious of her son's awful position. In all the agonies of brain fever she was rolling her proud head on the pillow, constantly, monotonously, from side to side. The tortures she endured were terrible, but perhaps those she escaped would have been more dreadful still. She was spared the consciousness that the son, who from his birth had been the

centre of all her pride, her love, and ambition, was the inmate of a jail.

Juliet Rivers, very ill and almost broken-hearted, lay in her own chamber, tended by Dinah.

Dafty Dyddy roamed about like a troubled spirit, and wept and sobbed frequently. And thus it came to pass that the necessary directions for the interment of the mother and the murdered child were given by the Vicar of Armine.

Mr. Ducane, the good vicar, had known Lady Loftus, and had liked and pitied her. He believed her to be a spotless wife, and, therefore, he decided to bury the two side by side in the family vault of the Armines, in Armine Church. He read the service himself, and was glad to be able to accomplish what he felt would have been the dearest wish of the mother's heart, namely, to let her sleep in death by the side of the child she had so loved on

earth. Full well did the good vicar know that, had the haughty countess been in a state to dictate, her daughter-in-law would have been denied admission to the family vault.

There, however, she now sleeps the sleep that knows no waking, save when the archangel shall summon the dead to appear before their Judge ; and when that awful day dawns upon a startled world, we would rather be in the place of the maligned, down-trodden woman, Lady Loftus, than in that of the self-righteous, haughty, and implacable Countess of Armine.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

“I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,  
But I know that I love thee, whatever thou art.”

MOORE.

YES, Osmond Armine was an inmate of Exeter jail! The ancient name of whose spotless purity and unsullied honour, the bearers had ever been so proud, was now on every lip, and coupled with the ghastly name of murderer. Every newspaper traded on this new and mysterious horror. In palace and in pothouse every tongue was busy in condemnation—nay, in execration—of one as yet untried in a court

of justice, but yet found guilty at the bar of public opinion. Peers over their Clicquot and their Burgundy, parsons over their port, working men over their pot of stout, and the whole female world over their tea, talked of nothing but "The Mysterious Child Murder at Armine Castle," and the cold-blooded murderer, the *Honourable* Osmond Armine. Yes, thus it was in Osmond's case, and thus it ever is in England before the accused has been tried or heard. And yet our law professes to believe every man innocent until he has been found guilty. We talk of the rigour of the law, we designate the law a tyrant, and yet how much more rigorous and tyrannical is society in every grade—how ready to condemn!

Lady Armine remained (fortunately for her, perhaps), unconscious that her favourite son was actually in prison, and that the scaffold loomed in the distance. She was constantly under the influence of the powerful opiates

which her medical attendants administered to save her from insanity. She was living in the phantom-peopled world, called into life by opium, or other sedatives of the same dark, dreamy, dreadful family.

It was piteous to hear this stern, haughty woman rambling in her opiate dreams about schemes for some great marriage or political advancement of the son whom public opinion had already doomed to the gallows. How helpless she lay there, that haughty woman of the indomitable will, whose slightest word had hitherto ensured such prompt obedience!—at whose dark, Hindoo, Medusa face the heart had been wont to grow chill!—whose frown had ever made all her attendants tremble!

And Juliet Rivers, where was she? Ah! Juliet, too, was very ill; but as her nature was a much gentler and more yielding one, under ordinary circumstances, so in times of trouble and anguish she proved to be the more heroic

of the two. After the first wild burst of anguish had wept itself away, and her feelings had recovered a little from the dreadful shock of seeing her lover torn from her to be conveyed to a prison, Juliet grew strangely calm—outwardly calm—but within raged that volcano, a loving woman's heart.

In spite of crowds of spectators hissing, yelling, execrating the supposed murderer of the infant earl, Juliet, like a true woman, had gloried in manifesting to Osmond, in his hour of trial, that devotion which she had till then so coyly concealed, both from himself and from all the world. As she clung to him, weeping bitterly in a wild farewell, her beauty and her deep distress enlisted the sympathy of all who beheld her.

“Poor creature!” they said to one another; “so young, so pretty, and so loving; how fortunate for her to escape a marriage with so bloodthirsty a villain.”

“You may well say that,” cried another; “why, of course, pretty even as she is, if they’d got married he’d have got tired of her and have taken fancy to another woman, and then he’d have made a short work with her as he did with the little lord. Hang him!”

“Ay, hang him!” said the person he addressed.

And hang him! hang him! hang him! was the universal cry.

“Ah! she’s had a narrow escape,” said another; “but she can’t think so, poor young thing—at least not just yet—but when he’s turned off and buried in the precincts of Exeter Jail, in a coffin full of quick-lime, she’ll maybe take a turn against him, just as your disconsolate widows do, after a bit; and then she’ll remember that there’s as good fish in the sea as ever were caught, and that there are better men for a pretty girl to choose from



than that blood-stained assassin, Osmond Armine—that base murderer !”

It was thus that those who knew little or nothing of the accused argued among themselves. Where he was well known, on the contrary, after the startling effect of the first overwhelming evidence against him, people began to doubt, to question, and to dispute—and some at length openly expressed a belief that a young man whose tenderness to everything that lived (and therefore suffered) was proverbial, and whose affection for the murdered child was so remarkable, could not have been really guilty of this base, cowardly, and cruel crime.

“ And yet the evidence is dead against him,” said one.

“ Such evidence would hang a bishop,” said another ; “ and yet I can’t help thinking he’d no more to do with the little lord’s murder than I had. And maybe after he’s swung

for it, the truth will come to light ; for it's my belief that 'murder will out' sooner or later."

At Exeter, to whose jail Osmond was consigned, there to await his trial at the assizes, he was very well known, and had always been very popular.

Osmond's father, the late Earl of Armine, was not an eldest son. He had only come into the titles and estates on the death of his elder brother. Up to the time when Osmond was nine or ten, his father had only been the second brother of a peer, and the Honourable Oscar Armine.

He had been a very fine, handsome, manly young fellow, and, though a second son, and very poor, he had favour in the bright eyes and warm heart of a certain beauty, whom his brother, the then earl, idolized. The result was a jealousy on the part of the peer, which produced an estrangement fatal to the interests

and advancement of the cadet. This feeling outlived the beautiful object of the two brothers' love; and, but for the death of the elder brother from consumption, the second son, Osmond's father, would always have been a poor and struggling man. All the poorer, and the more wretched in that poverty, because he had an "honourable" prefixed to a grand name, and nothing to keep up the dignity of his birth.

However, Osmond's father, even in those years of trouble, had wisely availed himself of such advantages as he could command for the education of his boys. He had married a beautiful and haughty daughter of the house of St. Aubyn, and three sons were the issue of this marriage. Their father, too poor at that time to educate them at Eton or Harrow, and yet attaching great importance to early training in a good school, wisely sent them to the Exeter Grammar School, and there

Osmond Armine was considered what school-boys call the "pluckiest" fellow in the school.

He was very popular with both the masters and the boys. He had many friends, who would have "gone," as they said, "through fire and water to serve him." Especially had he attached to himself three boys, who were the objects of the bullying of a great savage lout, whose chief delight was to torture and tyrannize over these three small boys.

Now Osmond's father had taught him to box. To a degree of muscular strength more than proportioned to his size, Osmond, as a boy, added no little science. He had a very quick eye, and great agility, with courage of the highest order. And yet he was a fair rosy boy, with almost feminine delicacy and regularity of features. He was not tall of his age, and was gracefully formed, and had soft, curling, fair hair, large, loving, dark eyes, and

a complexion of lilies and roses. He was so very pretty, that the boys called him "missy," and certainly at that time he was too pretty and delicate-looking for a boy. There could not have been a greater contrast than between "Big Ben" (as the bully we have spoken of was called) and Osmond Armine.

Big Ben was a great heavy ugly brute, cruel and overbearing, some three years older than Osmond Armine, but not so good a scholar as our hero, whom he affected to despise, but yet did not venture actually to assault.

The better scholar always in an English grammar-school has an advantage over a bigger, but more ignorant boy.

It was not, therefore, in self-defence that Osmond Armine resolved one day, spite of his lighter weight and inferior strength, to challenge Big Ben to fight, and to try with all his might and main to give him a licking. It

was for an act of great barbarity to these little boys that Osmond came to the resolution of challenging Big Ben.

The particular acts of cruelty for which Osmond Armine so longed to thrash this cowardly bully were as follows :—

He had induced, or rather terrified, three boys (all friends of Osmond) into climbing up into a somewhat slender tree—a cherry tree, and ordered them, at the imminent risk of a flogging from the head-master, to throw him down the cherries. These proving unripe, and not very palatable, the brute exerted all his strength to shake the tree violently, causing such terror thereby to the poor little fellows clinging to the branches, that one of them, in his alarm, lost his hold, and fell to the ground, severely hurting himself in the fall.

This act of barbarity coming to the knowledge of Osmond Armine, he sent a formal challenge to Big Ben.

Big Ben (whose real name was Benjamin Boulter), was so universally detested in the school, that it was supposed he would not very easily find a second. In his own craven heart he hoped this might prove to be the case. He, of course, accepted the challenge with a sneer and a swagger, but he inwardly and most devoutly prayed that the fight might never come off. He knew that, if he succeeded in beating a boy so much younger and so much less than himself, he could win no glory. On the other hand, his losing such a battle would make him the bye-word and laughing-stock of the school.

However, he had no idea of Osmond's science. He himself knew nothing of fighting, as "the art of self-defence," and when at length, rather than let Big Ben escape, a boy agreed to be his second, he looked at his great red hands and thought of his superior size and weight, and talked very big.

We are not going to enter into any minute details of this "school fight." The subject has been handled too often. Suffice it to say, that to Big Ben's astonishment and dismay, and to the delight of the whole school, young Osmond Armine gave "Big Ben" what the Irish call "the mother of a licking."

Soon after this, Big Ben left the grammar-school, and indeed the town altogether.

The three boys, whose wrongs had been thus punished and avenged by Osmond, were (two of them) older than himself, but very small and puny; the third was younger than the others, and very sickly. These three boys had suffered a martyrdom in the time of Big Ben. They had often thought of running away. But they had no place to run to. One of them had a step-father. One had a step-mother. The other was dependent on a cross old aunt, who, though she had plenty of money, only maintained her dead sister's only child as



a duty. Duty was her motto! and had her nephew run away from school, she would have thought it her duty to send him back again. She would probably have sent with him a letter to the head-master, begging that he would do his duty, and flog the runaway soundly.

And now Big Ben gone, and his disgrace acting most beneficially on all the incipient bullies of the school, Osmond's three *protégés*, and, indeed, all the younger boys, were in a sort of paradise. Osmond became their idol.

Paul Paley, Henry Hart, and Roger Ruff, the three boys in whose cause he had fought Big Ben, felt for their brave and triumphant companion a love amounting to idolatry, and a gratitude that bordered on enthusiasm.

Paul Paley was the son of a surgeon and general practitioner, whom the poor of the parish called Dr. Paley. Henry Hart was the

son of a tradesman. Roger Ruff's aunt was a spinster, living on her own means.

When Osmond, on his father's accession to the title and estates, left the school, and the now right honourable family removed to Armine Castle, Osmond did not cut his humble friends. He often invited them to Armine, where his education was going on under a private tutor. There his old schoolfellows found themselves in Elysium. Lady Armine, so stern to all the world beside, was very hospitable, and as affable as *she* could be, to the boys her Osmond liked to invite.

The Countess soon discovered their devotion to her son, and they received in consequence many haughty but substantial tokens of her favour.

For some years, however, previous to the mysterious child murder at Armine Castle, Osmond had lost sight of two of his old *protégés*. Paul Paley had become, like his father, a sur-

geon, and was considered in Exeter a very rising young man. Henry Hart's step-father had broke. His name had appeared in the *Gazette*, and he had died broken-hearted, leaving his son penniless, to shift for himself, and to do what he could for the step-mother, whose ill-will and severity had made his home as terrible to him as was school, under Big Ben's reign of terror.

Osmond, who was a great deal away from Armine Castle at this time, knew nothing of poor old Hart's bankruptcy, and the distress of his family. When it did come to his knowledge, he tried hard to discover what had become of his old friend Henry Hart.

Osmond Armine would have done much to serve him for the sake of the "auld lang syne," but Henry had left Exeter, and some declared he had gone to sea. All Osmond's efforts to discover him were in vain.

Meanwhile, Roger Ruff's rich maiden aunt

had died. She had bequeathed all her money to charities, and had left her only relative Roger a beggar! No one knew what had become of Roger, but some said he had joined a company of French travelling actors, who had come to perform at Exeter, and who belonged to some minor theatre in Paris. The manager required an Englishman to perform Milors and John Bulls, Jack Tars, and other comic English characters; and Roger Ruff, whom his wicked old aunt had left to starve, accepted the engagement and left Exeter with the French company. Miss Ruff had left a large sum to be spent on shoes and wearing apparel for the New Zealanders and Kaffirs, who would never put them on, and cared not that her nephew went barefoot and in rags!

## CHAPTER VIII.

Oh, that I were again a careless child !

WORDSWORTH.

It was a dreadful thing for Osmond Armine to enter Exeter (the place where he had been so popular) as a suspected murderer. The carriage in which, in company with two policemen, he drove up to the prison, was surrounded by an excited mob, yelling, shouting, and crying out for vengeance on Osmond and his haughty race. The police were obliged to have recourse to stratagem to get their prisoner safely lodged in the jail.

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Osmond had maintained a dignified com-

posure and an outward calm while in the presence of the policemen. When he found himself at length alone in his small prison chamber, the roars and yells of the disappointed mob outside were still audible, and the misery, the disgrace and the imminent peril of his position overwhelmed him! Throwing himself on his narrow pallet, with his face on the hard pillow, his long constrained feelings found vent in sobs and groans.

It was only a few days before his *entrée* into Exeter as a murderer that a deputation had waited on him at Armine Castle, to beg him, at the approaching general election, to stand for the borough. The request was couched in the most complimentary terms. The men of Exeter had promised to support him (as a Conservative candidate) heart and hand, and to place him at the head of the poll. And now the men of Exeter seemed athirst for the blood of this same Osmond

Armine! In spite of himself, as he drove through the well-known streets, he had caught sight of many a familiar face, which, wont to be all smiles, and full of respectful recognition, now turned pale at his appearance, while its owner either shudderingly withdrew, or, growing fierce, red, and excited, fell in with the crowd, and joined in the chorus of execrations.

Meanwhile, women who had known him from childhood, screamed and shook their fists at him. But women are very excitable beings, and these were mothers.

Two circumstances had especially tended to unnerve poor Osmond. The one was the fact that Paul Paley, now in partnership with his father as a surgeon, drove past in his father's brougham, trying to pretend not to see him. Paul's face, however, grew so deadly pale, and he turned his head so hastily, that Osmond felt that Paul had purposely avoided

to meet the eye of a murderer, or rather a suspected murderer.

The other circumstance which had so distressed Osmond was, that he had recognised in the jailer, who had so brusquely ushered him to his cell, the son of the bankrupt Hart! He was one of the very fellows (Paul Paley being another) for whose sake, as a boy, he had thrashed Big Ben, and upon whom both he and his haughty mother, Lady Armine, had lavished so many favours and so much hospitality. Having completely failed in every effort to earn a livelihood abroad and in London, Hal Hart had returned to Exeter, intending to try if any former friends, Osmond especially, would help him.

He arrived the day before the murder of the little earl. It so happened that the head jailer had died suddenly. The next day Hart, now a very powerful man, applied for the place, and was accepted.



Of course, as Osmond had not yet been tried, he was not subjected to the rigorous confinement and strict prison rules of a condemned felon. But to him, in his agony of mind, it mattered not what indulgences were granted him, what rooms awarded him, what refreshments the jailer placed on his little table. A choking spasm in his throat, and an agonising pain in his heart, made it impossible for him to take anything. All he wished, all he prayed for, was solitude; but that, of course, he could not ensure.

One of the most unbearable feelings connected with imprisonment on a criminal charge, is the consciousness that, night and day, an eye may be, and in all probability will be, upon you. Conscious of this degrading fact, and ashamed that any eye should witness the evidences of his broken spirit and wildly beating heart, Osmond still lay on his breast, and, though he heard a man's step, he did not look round.

“To think,” he said to himself, “that Paul Paley and Hal Hart should be able to look down on Osmond Armine!” .

His hands were clasped behind the nape of his neck as he lay with his face hidden in the pillow. Presently he heard some one approach his pallet. Two strong hands fervently seized his. Warm kisses were pressed again and again on those clasped fingers, so hot and dry.

A stalwart man fell heavily on his knees, beside Osmond's couch. Osmond Armine looked round in amazement. It was Hal Hart, the new jailer! The poor fellow was sobbing wildly, as he stammered out—

“Oh, sir! oh, my lord!—for that you are, by all the laws of the land—oh, old friend! dear schoolfellow! young Lion! as we used to call you, in the dear old times! I didn't dare seem to know you even when you arrived here. I forced myself to look stern and

savage, like the rest of them, when I longed to fall at your feet, and tell you I am ready to fight for you, now, ay, and to the death, too; to fight for you, as you did for me and Paley, and Ruff, in the time of Big Ben, the bully; and I controlled myself, for I thought if the turnkeys knew my feelings towards you, they'd make mischief, and some other would have the charge of you, and so I kept quiet till I could see you alone, and tell you that, just as I loved you twelve years ago, I love you now, and that what man can do to comfort and to save you, that Hal Hart will do for his best friend! Ah! speak to me, old schoolfellow—friend!—champion! protector! that was, martyr that is! Tell me you believe Hal Hart would die to serve you.”

As these expressions of love, gratitude, and devotion, burst from the very heart of his old schoolfellow and *protégé*, Osmond slowly turned round, raised himself, and, looking

Hart straight in the face, said, "Hal! do *you* believe me guilty of this murder?"

"Do *I* believe it? I, who know if there's a kind, generous heart on earth, it is yours, Master Osmond—my lord, I ought to say—for, by what I hear, that's what you are now, by rights! No. If the life of my body, and the salvation of my soul depended on whether I was right or wrong, I'd stake both, gladly, freely, on your innocence, Master Osmond; for, I believe, if ever an angel walked the earth, that angel's name is Osmond Armine."

"Bless you, Hal! Bless you, and thank you for that assurance of your faith in me!" said Osmond, as he hid his face on the now brawny chest of him who, twelve years before, had been a delicate boy, only protected by Osmond Armine from the ceaseless and ignominious brutalities of Big Ben, but who now was a very Hercules himself.

"Paul Paley has not your faith in me, Hal,"

said Osmond Armine, as he paced up and down his cell, leaning on Hal Hart's shoulder; "he evidently thinks me guilty of this foul, unnatural, and cruel murder!"

"Not he, Master Osmond," said Hart; "he knows you too well. He's not forgotten old times any more than I have. I saw him yesterday, and though he's up in the world, and I'm down—for he's a doctor, driving about in his father's brougham, and I'm a broken-down chap, who's failed in everything, and a bankrupt's son into the bargain—he knew me at a glance, and he shook hands as cordially as if the world had gone as well with me as it has done with him; and he spoke of—of—the little lord's murder."

"And what did he say?" cried Osmond, in an excited voice, and his pale cheek flushing.

"He said, Master Osmond, just as I say—and as poor Roger Ruff would say if he were here—that it's all some cursed plot,

some vile conspiracy; that you've the best heart and the noblest nature he'd ever met with; and he added, 'Tell him to say he's ill; it'll be no untruth, for he's gone through enough to kill a Hercules; but if he complains of sickness it's *I* shall attend him; for my father's withdrawing from buisness, and I'm now the surgeon of the jail. He's as innocent as we are,' he added. 'They may well call it the "Armine Castle mystery." But oh! to think that he—that brave, noble-hearted, kindest one, who fought Big Ben to prevent his bullying us, should be committed to prison on the charge of murdering an innocent child! He must stand his trial, I suppose,' added Paul Paley! 'and it's to be hoped he'll have Bovill and Montague Chambers to defend him, and find out a clue to this dark mystery; but if it should go against him, even then I've a scheme in my head—but we'll talk of that another time.' "

"Hal," said Osmond, "I cannot tell you what comfort it is to me to find my old school-fellows—those who knew me best—believe me innocent. Good night, Hal, I can sleep now."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Osmond was very ill. It was no pretence, he was in a burning fever. Paul Paley, the general practitioner and surgeon of the jail, was sent for.

Cold, stern, reserved and severe in the presence of the governor of the jail and the other attendants, Paul Paley was no sooner alone with his patient, and secure from the chance of interruption, than all the assumed coldness and disdain of the medical practitioner melted away. He threw his arms round Osmond. Osmond had been removed to the infirmary. He was in a large room now. He had a comfortable bed.

"I have deceived them one and all, from

the governor to the under-turnkey," said Paul, laying his face beside that of Osmond, as he remembered to have done when twelve years before Osmond had been very ill at school, and he had been allowed to sit with him.

What a small pale face Paul Paley's was then! Now the features were marked, the little short nose had become aquiline, the pallid complexion was now of a ruddy brown; black eyebrows and bushy whiskers, of a sable hue, gave a marked, manly character to Paul Pale's countenance. By its side Osmond's white profile looked like that of an Apollo chiselled out of a Parian marble.

A similar contrast was presented by the hands and voices of the two schoolfellows. Osmond's thin white fingers were fervently clasped in the strong healthy-coloured hand of his old schoolfellow.

"I deceived them all, but I did not deceive



you, I hope, Osmond," he said ; " whatever it may be politic for me to appear before others, you at least can never doubt my entire devotion to you !"

" I thought," said Osmond, " when you drove past me yesterday, that you believed me guilty."

" Then you must have thought me a fool, Osmond!—an ungrateful fool!—a fellow without a memory of head or heart ! Can you believe I have forgotten what you were at school?—and is not the boy (as the proverb has it) the father to the man?"

" Yet all the world believes me guilty."

" Then your triumph will be all the greater, dear friend, when you compel them to own their blindness and their folly."

" How can I do that in the face of the evidence they bring against me?"

" Your counsel will do that."

" My counsel?"

"Yes."

"I have not thought about counsel."

"Then it is high time you should."

"Whom do you recommend?"

"Mr. Bovill, Q.C. I heard him defend a man once, and he did it energetically, and with close convincing argument. His great powers of mind are coupled with remarkable physical force; and he has such a ready wit and such a withering sarcasm, that I said to myself, if I ever want a counsel, give me Mr. Bovill, Q.C. But you are tired and feverish. You have plenty of time to think of these things. The first object now is to get you well again."

"Paul Paley," said Osmond Armine, "don't think me a coward. I daresay I shall rally; and even if the worst comes to the worst, behave like a man; but indeed, Paul, the events of the last fortnight have quite unmanned me. You do not know all; but, dear friend of the

long ago, you shall know all—all my causes of anguish and despair. You remember Juliet Rivers?"

Paul Paley started, and a crimson flush stole over his face.

"Yes; your father's beautiful ward—that spirit of joy, that Hebe of bloom, who used to spend the holidays at Armine Castle, and contrive to join us in our wildest adventures by land and sea. What a lovely romp she was! But what of her?"

"I will tell you when we meet again, Paul; I am unequal to the task now."

"Yes, now the best thing you can do is to take your composing draught, and trust in Providence and your true friends. Is it not wonderful that Hart—Hal Hart—should just have been appointed head-jailer or turnkey here? Poor fellow! he has indeed come down in the world, but he won't think so if his being what he now is enables him to be of any ser-

vice to you. Good night, and God bless you !”

“ God bless you, Paul ; when will you come again ?”

“ To-morrow morning, and so good night, and try to compose yourself.”

## CHAPTER IX.

And dreams in their development have breath,  
And tears, and torture, and the touch of joy.

BYRON.

ALTHOUGH Osmond Armine was in prison, and, as we had said, society had already found him GUILTY, and sentenced him to DEATH, the search for the weapon and for the assassin's clothes was not given up.

The surgeon who had made the post-mortem examination of the little earl's body, gave it as their opinion that the wound in the throat (which had caused death) had been inflicted by a sharp knife or razor.

The detectives, Hunt and Finis, had closely questioned the servants, who had laid before

them all the knives and razors in the Castle. Every set was complete—no knife was missing.

\* \* \* \* \*

One night, soon after Osmond's removal to Exeter prison, Juliet had a very vivid dream. It was about a very curious old-fashioned knife richly mounted. The handle of this knife was of solid gold, and it was crusted with gems. It was a heir-loom in the Armine family. A legend belonged to this knife; it was, that Sir Maurice D'Armine, in the reign of Henry the Seventh, had saved his sovereign's life with this very knife, by bleeding him when stunned by a fall from his horse.

A superstition was also attached to the knife—namely, that no one of the Armine family who possessed this knife would ever die a violent death.

When Osmond's father died, Lady Armine took this knife from a hiding-place in her late

lord's bedstead, of which she only knew the secret, and gave it, in its antique sheath, to her son. He had shown it to Juliet, the first time she visited the Castle after his father's death. Lady Armine had insisted on his having his late father's bedstead. And to Juliet he revealed the hiding-place of the mysterious knife.

Armine Castle was full of curiosities. The bedstead of the late earl was one of them. The four posts were of black oak, carved in the forms of the four evangelists. The right post near the head of the bed represented Mathew, and in the fold of his drapery (carved in black oak) was a secret spring, which being pressed, a small recess appeared, in which the knife was hid, just within easy reach of the hand of the occupant of the bed.

In Juliet's dream, she sought Osmond's room, approached the bed-post, touched the spring—the recess was there, but the knife was

gone! So vivid was this dream, that Juliet could not rest till she had ascertained whether the knife was or was not in its hiding-place. She had not thought of it for months, although, when first Osmond showed it to her, it had interested her greatly.

It was very early when Juliet rose, and hurried to Osmond's room. The grey dawn stealing in at the oriel window enabled her to see her way. She reached the room. On the mantelpiece were matches and a taper. She lighted the taper and drew near the head of the bed. She examined the bed-post. She touched the spring. The crypt or recess was revealed, as the little door flew open. The knife was gone! Juliet shuddered. Who but Osmond Armine, the countess, and herself, knew the secret of this hiding-place?"

"Ah, some one may have watched him," she said; "some one *must* have watched him when he has taken the knife out. No, no,



no ! I will not let even this strange circumstance weigh in my mind against my experience of his virtue—his truth. Shame upon me for trembling thus ! I am weak—ill ; I will go back to bed.”

Juliet Rivers rose from her bed of sickness and sorrow, resolved not to think any more about the knife, nor to give way to any weakness, bodily or mental, that might prevent her using every possible means to discover the mystery of the murder at Armine Castle. Of Osmond’s innocence she had not a shadow of doubt. It is true, a terrible misgiving *had* crossed her mind when first she read her lover’s blood-stained note ; but his whole conduct and bearing ever since the fatal morning of the murder (particularly his demeanour at the inquest) had restored her entire confidence, and made her heartily ashamed of even a momentary suspicion of one so good and so noble.

Juliet had but one friend to whom she could confide her hopes and fears, her plans and her intentions. A very honourable, but a very zealous friend, was the confidante in question.

It was Dinah, the pretty young woman who waited on Juliet Rivers, and who, when no one else remembered the mourner in the turret-chamber, tended her with such gentle and devoted anxiety.

“A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.”

Dinah had a fellow-feeling with Juliet Rivers. Dinah was in love. Dinah's love was not a very happy one. Her friends disapproved of her choice. The young man whom she preferred to all her other admirers was steady, well-conducted, good-looking, and very persevering in his attentions to her, but he had the reputation of being very mean.

Dinah, of course, could not believe that he

was really mean, or she could not have loved him. No woman can love a man whom she considers either mean or vulgar. He may be both, and she not think him so ; but if she does think so, she cannot love him.

Dinah's family, who were all generous, even to imprudence, and very hospitable, disliked, as a suitor for Dinah's hand, a man who never would join in any little plan of amusement that entailed the smallest outlay. They tried to laugh Dinah out of what they called her "sneaking kindness" for Mark.

Dinah was very unhappy. She loved Mark, and she loved her family, and she could not please all parties. Full of trouble in her own poor woman's heart, she felt the deepest sympathy with Juliet in her much keener, deeper sorrows.

Juliet found great comfort and some help in Dinah's strong natural logic and womanly sympathy.

“Some one has done this cruel murder, miss,” she said. “Of that there can be no doubt. You are certain, and I am certain, it is not Mr. Osmond. Who, then, could it be?”

“People suspect Mr. Osmond,” said Juliet, weeping, “because the little angel’s death makes him Earl of Armine; that is, it would do so if the murderer could be discovered. Oh, Dinah, if I could but find any clue to enable me to unravel this dark web of blood and crime!”

“May I talk it over with a friend of mine, miss?” said Dinah, blushing deeply; “a friend who has a very good head, and all his wits about him.”

“Oh, yes, Dinah,” said Juliet; “all the world is talking of this dreadful event—then why not your friend?”

\* \* \* \* \*

One morning Juliet was roused from

troubled dreams by the loud barking and baying of Hubert beneath her window. The noise the dog was making was so continuous and unusual, that, to Juliet's excited fancy, it seemed to have a meaning. She arose, dressed herself hastily, and hurried downstairs. As she entered the parterre, in which was Hubert's house, she heard the town-clock strike four. Hubert was wild with joy at her approach. Juliet undid his chain; and, led on, as it seemed, by some invisible hand, she followed the huge bloodhound, who bounded away across the park, the underwood, the common, and on to the marshes, which, at that early hour, were enveloped in a sort of vapour. Juliet, rapt in thought, and her eyes fixed on the ground, was unaware of the vicinity of any living creature, when suddenly an unearthly voice broke the stillness of the morn.

“Who are you, that are bold enough to

trespass on the Ghoul's freehold?" were the words uttered in something between the scream of a peacock and the croak of a raven. "Welcome!—welcome! I'm just going to breakfast. See the fine, fat, live frogs, and the dried toads I've got ready. Once I fed on turtle—I'd fair guests then. Now I breakfast on toads and frogs, and Beauty comes to the feast!"

Juliet, wild with terror, stood rooted to the spot. The Ghoul—for it was that mysterious recluse of the marsh—strode towards her, and seized her by the arms!

"Come to breakfast!" he cried. "Toads—toads for me! fine fat toads, and plenty of them; dried in the sun, and salted with seawater. No Westphalia hams can match their flavour! And see, I've got lava and samphire from the rocks, and the sea-bird's eggs—so sweet! This is my birthday, that's why I'm going to feast."

Juliet did not shriek, she did not faint—she stood like a marble statue, rather of wonder than terror ; for her eyes had lighted on an object connected so closely with the safety of one so much dearer to her than herself, that all fear for her own life was lost in her anxiety to know how the Ghoul had become possessed of it. The object in question was a knife, which was stuck in his leathern belt, and on which the light of dawn danced ruddily. It was the mysterious gold-handled knife which was gone from its hiding-place. There was blood on the embossed handle.

“The knife !—the knife !” she cried, pointing to it ; “tell me where you got that knife?”

The Ghoul drew the knife from his girdle, and brandished it in the air.

“Come to breakfast,” he said, “and I’ll tell you where I found the knife.”

He took her by the arm to lead her, or rather drag her, into his hut. And she, fear-

less for herself, where her lover's life and fair fame were at stake, resolved to pretend to comply, in order to learn where he (the Ghoul) had found the knife, which she believed to be the weapon which had been used by the murderer of the little earl !



## CHAPTER X.

“ Meanwhile, long anxious—weary—still the same  
Roll'd day and night, his soul could terror tame—  
The fearful interval of doubt and dread  
When ev'ry hour might doom him worse than dead.”

JULIET, with the one great object of her life in view, and with her hands tightly pressed upon her wildly beating heart, conquered her fears, and suffered the Ghoul to lead her into the hut. Hubert, the bloodhound, followed, wagging his tail. He had evidently conceived a liking for the mysterious and shaggy recluse.

The interior of the Ghoul's habitation was not half as wretched as Juliet had expected. She had often heard of this singular

being, although it so happened that she had never seen him before. This was probably owing to the fact that she had never been on the marsh—at least, not that remote part of it called “The Ghoul’s Freehold,” at an hour when he was abroad, before this morning. Report said that the Ghoul never stirred till midnight, and then only prowled about till dawn. Superstition averred that at cock-crow he disappeared. It was believed, too, that the Ghoul lived without fire; that he never washed himself; that he never cooked his victuals, and lived on rats, mice, toads, frogs, and a few herbs, such as water-cresses, and dandelion, and samphire, for which the rocks, in these parts, were renowned.

These absurd stories he delighted to confirm. The more they were believed and disseminated, the more secure was his solitude, the greater the dread he inspired. He wished to scare away all intruders. In order to do so,

he pretended to be much more monstrous, wild, and mysterious, than he really was. We have seen that he invited Lady Loftus to sup with him on live rats and mice. He supposed she would not fail to tell the little world of Armine that the Ghoul fed on such "small deer." But this was not in reality the case.

One of his great amusements was rat-catching, and we will not aver that if other food had failed he would not have satisfied his hunger on the large, fat, brown water-rats he so delighted to trap; but then he would have cooked them, for it was a mistake that he made no fire. The reason for that belief was, that he never lighted any while there was a chance that the smoke might be seen by anyone wandering near his freehold.

When first this strange being settled in the marshes, he arranged with an old man, a carrier, from E—— (himself an odd, mysterious old fellow, who travelled at night) to leave,

at a certain hiding-place in the rocks (agreed upon them between them), a quartern loaf, and a few other necessaries, once a fortnight. The Ghoul placing the money, for payment, in readiness beforehand, under a certain stone, and going in the dead of the night in search of the loaf, &c. It was untrue, also, as we have observed, that he used no fire.

One of his midnight occupations was to pick up sticks, which he consumed as fuel. He had thought to horrify Juliet by the mention of live frogs and dried toads. He wished to inspire her with the same terror with which he had filled Lady Loftus's heart. He would, probably, have succeeded, but that a feeling much stronger than fear—LOVE—emboldened Juliet to enter his hut, and to try to make him tell her how he came to be in possession of the antique gold-handled knife, which she felt certain *was* the weapon which had been used in the murder of the little earl.

Juliet was agreeably surprised to see a bright wood fire burning, and a pot, something like those which gipsies use, seated thereon. In it a rabbit, a duck, and some vegetables and herbs were boiling. There was a rude table, and two stools. On a shelf was one large book. Juliet hoped it might be a Bible. It was a folio edition of Shakspeare. There was part of a loaf on the table, and a wooden bowl of goat's milk. The Ghoul had several goats, and he himself milked the females at midnight.

"You are a brave girl," said the Ghoul, laying aside his wild dramatic manner, and looking and speaking almost rationally; "you are a very brave girl, and I have great sympathy with bravery. Of course you have often heard of the Ghoul of the Marsh, although this is the first time we have met?"

While the Ghoul spoke, he busied himself in turning out into a large wooden dish the

savoury contents of the pot. Hubert, the bloodhound, took an active part in the Ghoul's proceedings at this time. He gave a loud, joyous bark. He wagged his tail, and drawing near the Ghoul as he leant over the pot, placed his large, thoroughbred tan fore-paws on the shoulders of the recluse, licked his cheek with his long, flexible, peach-blossom tongue, and while his broad, silky, tan ears hung on either side of his grand, solemn, benign face, Juliet thought, as they both leant over the boiling cauldron, that Hubert looked the more human and intelligent of the two. The fact was, that in the Ghoul, as in all men in whom eccentricity borders on insanity, there was some link wanting.

The reader must not imagine that no such being as this recluse of the marshes really exists. In former times such a character was by no means uncommon. Even in these days there are in different counties of England

several men of birth and fortune, who, in fulfilment of a rash vow, wrung from them by some fierce passion, deadly disappointment, or long despair, live the sort of life we have described as that of him whom the rustics of Armine named the Ghoul.

In England every man's home is his castle ; and if that home is a mud hut only, as long as he owes no man anything, no one has a right to interfere with him, or disturb, intrude on, or assault him there.

A very remarkable specimen of this sort of half-hermit, half-savage, is now living in one of the home counties, and in him there is a revolting peculiarity from which our Ghoul is free. The recluse in question is a filthy creature, never (in accordance with his vow) indulging in any kind of ablution ; while our Ghoul never suffered a day to pass without a bath in the sea. He added, indeed, to the horrors of the Haunted Rocks, as they were

called, between the Castle and the ruins of the Abbey, by taking off his wild garb at night on the sands, and swimming for an hour or two by starlight, or moonlight, or no light at all, whether the sea were rough or calm.

As Juliet gazed at the strange figure gloat-  
ing over the savoury mess he had cooked, and stirring it with a two-pronged, long-handled fork, such as haymakers use, she felt a strong conviction that, if not quite insane, he was at least a monomaniac. He seemed to Juliet to be about sixty years of age.

A profusion of tawny-coloured hair, originally auburn, but now shot with silver, waved back from a broad, receding forehead, and fell in long, snaky masses down to his shoulder-blades.

He had very bushy eyebrows of the same colour, and thick whiskers and moustachios to match, with a Belisarius beard of a similar hue, which descended to his girdle. He had



very large, prominent light eyes, a long aquiline nose, a mouth whose ghastly grin revealed a set of large but even and white teeth. His ears were of unusual size, and he moved them as he spoke. He had a very long throat, very long hands with claw-like nails, and bare feet corresponding with his hands.

His dress resembled that of Robinson Crusoe, being made entirely of hair skins and rabbit skins, stitched together by himself. He wore a leathern belt, and in it was stuck the gold-handled knife.

Juliet could not doubt that it was the same curious antique knife which she had missed from its hiding-place in Osmond's bedstead. The fire-light played on the embossed handle of gold and gems which poor Osmond had pointed out to her as of exquisite workmanship and great antiquity.

Juliet grew very impatient of the Ghoul's long preparation. There was such a wild

light in his eyes, and such a maniac grin distended his mouth, she began to despair of ever getting any rational answer from this monomaniac.

"I am risking my life," she said to herself, "a life that may be essential to Osmond, and to the clearing of his fair fame, and all for an *ignis fatuus*. What hope is there that that Orson will tell me anything comprehensive or connected about the knife? And even if he did, would his evidence be admitted in a court of justice? Is it possible that he can understand the nature of an oath?"

As she thought on these things, the Ghoul, with a kind of wild scream of joy, seized a portion of the dish he had cooked with his fingers, and began greedily to gnaw and devour a part of the rabbit. He looked so fierce and so maniacal as he did so, that Juliet grew very white and cold. She trembled in every limb, and wished herself safe back in the turret

chamber, with kind, pretty Dinah sleeping on the sofa in the recess to keep "Miss Juliet" company, and blushing in her deep sleep, and murmuring with her rosebud lips the name of "Mark"—"Mean Mark" as her friends and the villagers called him, but whom she could not believe to be really mean, or she could not have loved him as she did.

The Ghoul, having satisfied his own ravenous hunger, handed Juliet a leg, which he severed from the duck's carcass. He threw the bones he had picked to his friend and admirer, Hubart, the bloodhound.

"Eat that leg," he said, "that's prime. Once I had French cooks and feasted princes, but I never ate anything so good as this."

"I am not hungry," said Juliet, in a faltering voice; "I never breakfast till nine, and I have no appetite before."

"Give it here, then," said the Ghoul, "it's a tit-bit, and I've not half-done."

“You said you would tell me where you found that knife,” said Juliet.

“That knife? It’s my knife; it was my grandfather’s knife!” and he took it from his girdle, and brandished it above his head, the red light of his wild eyes matching that of the firelight playing on the bright steel blade. “Who claims this knife? This is an enchanted knife. This knife let out royal blood once, and saved a monarch’s life. While I have this knife in my belt, steel cannot pierce my heart, bullet cannot enter my brain, cord cannot strangle, nor water drown me. Good spirits sent me this knife, which I had not seen since my grandfather died when I was a boy.”

“Of course none but good spirits could have done it,” said Juliet, with love-taught presence of mind. “But where did they place it ready for your hand?”

“In the rocks—in the rocks! They know

I live among the rocks in the sultry summer nights. I found it wrapped up in a bundle of clothes—blood-stained clothes!—and I meant to wash them, and wear them, too. So I left them, meaning to fetch them next night; and lo, when I went to look for them, they were gone!”

“What sort of clothes were they?”

“Good clothes—bonnie clothes—useful clothes; but stained and stiff with blood. Oh, I’d have washed them clean, though! The shirt was white and fine; the rest were black or very dark. The knife was in the coat pocket, in a sheath. Oh, I may find them yet! They’re good clothes, and I must have ’em. But hark—the cock crows! Haste away—away!”

He raked out the fire as he spoke, lifted a trap-door in a corner of the hut, and disappeared under ground. There he slept away the time, burrowing in the warm earth like an

ancient Briton, until midnight came round again, when he woke like a giant refreshed, to reappear again, making night hideous by his ghastly and mysterious presence.

Hubert, the bloodhound, remained for some time with his black nose and broad dewlaps, snuffing at the trap-door through which the Ghoul had disappeared. He was whining piteously after his departed friend, until Juliet, bitterly disappointed and weeping wildly, rose to leave the Ghoul's hut. As she did so, the trap-door suddenly opened, and the Ghoul's shaggy head and broad shoulders, in their rabbit-skin jacket, reappeared.

"Safe bind safe find," he said, his red eyes shooting fire; "go! and let me make my door fast."

"May I come again to ask if you have found the clothes?"

"You may; I'll tell you; but I'm sure I shall find them. I know every cleft and cre-

vice in the rocks ; and, what's more, I was out hidden up in one of my caves when the owner of the clothes hid them there. I looked through a loophole, and I saw the moonlight on his white face."

"Do you know him?" cried Juliet.

"No, I know no man."

"Should you know him again if you saw him?"

"Do you hear that cock crowing again?" cried the Ghoul ; "will you go away at once, or must I drive you away?"

He brandished the knife as he spoke, and Juliet rushed out of the hut, followed by Hubert. The Ghoul then secured the rude door of his hut, and Juliet, cold, pale, shivering, weeping, and trembling in every limb, retraced her steps across the dreary, lonely marsh.

## CHAPTER XI.

And even the name I have worshipped in vain  
Shall awake not the sigh of remembrance again,  
For to bear is to conquer our fate.

CAMPBELL.

AFTER Juliet had walked about a quarter of a mile, the excitement which had upheld her, during her long and terrific interview with the Ghoul, gave way. A deadly faintness stole over her senses. The misty marsh with its rushes and pools swam before her eyes, consciousness forsook her, and she sank on the ground in a swoon.

How long she remained in that state of insensibility she did not know, but as it was grey dawn when consciousness forsook her, and the



summer sun shone fiercely upon her face when she came to herself, she must have been in that syncope for some hours.

When she opened her eyes, Daft Dyddy was bending over her. He had sprinkled her cold pale face with water from a pool on the very edge of which she lay. Hubert was still by her side. He had kept watch and ward over her all the time she lay unconscious there, and occasionally he licked her pale brow with his warm, soft, peach-blossom tongue.

Daft Dyddy was very anxious to know what had brought Juliet Rivers to the marshes at that early hour, or, indeed, at all. The first words she had uttered with returning life seemed to have excited his curiosity and even horror, for he grew very pale and cold, and trembled as he listened.

Those words were—

“The knife, the antique gold-handled knife, Osmond’s enchanted knife! The Ghoul! he

has the knife. Where are the blood-stained clothes of the murderer? The Ghoul will find them !”

“ Oh ! I am dreaming, Dyddy,” she said, smiling faintly ; “ dreaming of the Ghoul.”

“ Dear Miss Rivers,” said Daft Dyddy, wiping Juliet’s face, wet with the water he had sprinkled on it ; “ well, then, you have had a very hideous dream.”

“ I have, indeed,” said Juliet, with a shudder.

“ But what brought you here ?”

“ I could not rest. I cannot rest while Osmond is in prison on a charge of murder. Oh ! Dyddy, if the weapon and the clothes of the murderer cannot be found to disprove Osmond’s having done this base deed, and to fix it on the real criminal, they will hang him, hang him by the neck—his own beautiful marble-white neck—Dyddy, until he is dead, dead, dead !”

Then wild sobs and bursts of hysterical anguish rent Juliet's bosom, and shook her delicate frame.

"Oh! is it not too dreadful!" she cried, "that *he*—that dear, that good, that noble one, should suffer for another's crime?"

"*Another's?*" said Daft Dyddy.

"Another's—yes, another's? Why, *you* do not believe that my gentle, noble, merciful, generous Osmond did this foul and cruel murder?"

Daft Dyddy was silent.

"Great heaven!" cried Juliet. "Why do you not speak. I thought you were his friend?"

"I am his friend, his true, devoted friend," said Dyddy; "so much and so entirely his friend, that had he shed, like a second Herod, the blood of all the Innocents in the land, that blood could not wash his image from my heart."

“What do you mean? You cannot think him guilty?”

“To the world I would and will maintain his innocence,” said Dyddy; “to you, his affianced, in this wild, lonely marsh, I own I do believe him guilty.”

“Guilty!—he guilty of the murder of that sweet child—the child he loved?”

“Loved! Can man really love the only obstacle that exists between him and the woman he idolizes, adores, worships?”

“How could that dear infant be that obstacle?”

“How? That child stood between Osmond Armine and an earldom.”

“But Osmond did not court rank and title.”

“No, but you did; or, at least, you made him think so, and he courted you. Do you remember the ball at Hyde Park House?”

“Too well!—too well!”

“He went to that ball half wild with hope

and joy. At that ball you favoured Lord Castleville. You smiled upon him; you flirted, coquetted, encouraged him. You taunted Osmond Armine in his jealous anguish. You said that it was a fine thing to be a peer; that 'my lady' had a very captivating sound. He left Hyde Park House in all the frenzy of jealousy and despair. I watched him that night; had I not done so, he would have been a suicide. A change came o'er his spirit. The next time you wrought him to madness. He saw the little earl in your arms as you smiled on that brainless fop, Castleville. 'But for that child,' he said to himself, 'I could give her a higher, a more ancient title, and a nobler fortune and position than that fool ever could. As my wife she would take precedence of his. That child has not sinned; it would go straight to heaven, nor live to feel the anguish I feel now.' Juliet, you can guess the rest."

“You have no warrant for what you say, Dyddy; Osmond never told you that he had done this deed of blood and shame, or that he meditated so black a crime.”

“No; but he told me he would die a thousand deaths to call you his, for one brief honeymoon. Juliet, do not weep. You are not to blame if nature has given you those rare, peculiar charms that drive men mad. You are young and thoughtless. When you flirted with Lord Castleville and twitted Osmond, you little guessed with what edge-tools she plays who trifles with men’s fiercest passions.”

“Dydddy, your words are barbed arrows. My guilt, my folly, are clear enough. I do not defend my weak and vain, and sinful conduct. It might have wrought a meaner man to do this dreadful deed; but it has not made Osmond a murderer. With his principles, no sinful, vain coquette on earth (had she a

thousand times my charms) could have wrought on Osmond Armine to do an act so cruel, so criminal, and so base."

"And yet Marmaduke, the infant Earl of Armine, sleeps in his bloody grave; and who but poor Osmond could have had any motive for the murder of that child? Who else could have hoped to profit, even in the slightest degree, by the butchery of that sweet babe?"

"Dyddy, I can hear no more; my heart is sick, my brain reels. Help me back to the Castle, Dyddy. Support me! I shall drop!"

Daft Dyddy threw his arms round the slender, supple waist of the dropping girl. He felt the faint throb of her poor heart beneath his hand. A deadly pallor stole over Daft Dyddy's features. He could not resist the passionate impulse that urged him to press her to his heart. She was quite unconscious of the embrace that caused *him* such bewildering emotion.

The fatigue and the excitement of a day which had begun for her at early dawn, had completely overpowered her, and when, amazed by her passive endurance of his embrace, he gazed upon her sweet face with passionate tenderness, he found she was again insensible. She had fainted in his arms.

Daft Dyddy, though he still had a sort of hitch or halt in his gait, was no longer a delicate, feeble or weakly youth ; he was a strong, able-bodied young man. The improvement in his bodily strength had been gradual. That in his mental development was very sudden. Never, till this morning, had he spoken to Juliet, or indeed to any one, without a species of stutter. Never had he said anything that revealed any great powers of reasoning, or any approach to eloquence. That he had long loved Juliet Rivers, he himself well knew ; but that there was even the slightest gleam of hope for him as a suitor for



her hand, had never occurred to him, until he found himself alone with her in the wild, remote marshes, talking to her of the certainty of Osmond's guilt, which, of course, implied that of his doom. He had received many marks of kindness and favour from Osmond; but regard or friendship in man, however constant it may have been, was never more than as a pale, twinkling star in the presence of the dawn of love, that refulgent sun of the soul!

How soon do the strongest cords that bind man to man fall asunder, if the boy-god's torch is but applied to them! Daft Dyddy's tyrant, Lady Armine, was no longer at hand, to taunt, to humble, to rebuke the 'poor dependent. By her he had never been acknowledged even as a "poor cousin," for she believed that he was the illegitimate son of her husband's brother.

Nor did she ever fail to sneer at any preten-

sions the poor fellow made to be considered a gentleman and an Armine. She had laughed him to scorn once, because Osmond had addressed a letter to him as Dydymus Armine, Esq. ; and had said that *Dydymus* alone would have been designation enough. She would never have dared to have treated a page or a footman, who could have given her warning, as she did this poor lad. Merely to mortify him, she had made him draw the late infant earl in a small carriage with shafts, meant for a donkey or a pony, but into which she compelled Daft Dyddy to harness himself ; nor did she chide the little, spoilt boy, when he lashed Daft Dyddy with a long whip he had for the purpose.

She had not allowed Dyddy to sit down to table or to take his meals in her presence ; and she had constantly sent him out on errands when the weather was such that any one of the servants would have refused to go. And

now a dreadful fate had laid that she-Lucifer on a bed of sickness.

Daft Dyddy was like the slave, when Death has struck down the overseer, and stiffened the hand with the cat-o'-nine-tails in its grasp, and about to descend on the shrinking negro's flesh. And more than that—Daft Dyddy had seen his mother. Yes, he had seen her more than once, after an absence of ten years !

The first time he saw her (at least since he had been an inmate of the Castle) was on the occasion of his being sent, in a violent storm, to the "Armine Arms," at B——, a small town some few miles from Armine. He was sent there, in such tempestuous weather, to fetch some soda-water for her ladyship. The servants had refused to go in such a storm—Daft Dyddy alone had not dared refuse.

As he arrived at the "Armine Arms," wet through, the landlady asked him into the parlour, to take a cup of tea with her, and to

dry his coat. A red-faced woman, very gaudily dressed, was already in that room.

As the landlady, who knew Daft Dyddy well, and called him Mr. Dydymus, asked after the Countess, and the family at Armine Castle, the overdressed, red-faced lady exclaimed,

“ If *you* are Dydymus Armine, come to my arms—I am your mother !”

She then explained that she had intended to write to him at the Castle, to ask him to call on her, at the “ Armine Arms,” B——, but that as chance had brought him thither, she should beg the landlady to show her and her son into a private room, and tell him what she had to say to him then and there.

“ I suppose you can spend the rest of the day with me here, Dyddy,” she said ; “ this is your birthday. You are twenty-one to-day, and I have some little things belonging to your late poor dear father to give you, and some important papers, which I promised him

you should see, as soon as you became of age."

Daft Dyddy, to his mother's great surprise and indignation, informed her that he did not dare keep the Countess waiting for her soda-water, but he promised his mother to visit her again, when Lady Armine had retired to rest, if she would pitch her tent in the village of Armine, at the foot of the Castle. He promised to sup with her there, at eleven o'clock, and she reserved all she had to communicate till he joined her at the comfortable old inn at Armine.

What Mrs. Grigson's important communications were will be seen hereafter. Certainly they seemed to have an exhilarating effect on Daft Dyddy. He returned to the Castle with a flushed cheek and an elastic step, and he saw his mother several times on the sly, after he had been dismissed to bed by the Countess.

The frightful tragedy of the murder of the infant earl put a stop to these visits to his

mother, for, as at that time everyone in Armine Castle was under the superintendence of the police, no one had the privilege of going out on any pretext whatever.

The verdict that sent Osmond Armine to Exeter Jail, and that stretched the haughty Countess on a bed of sickness, restored liberty to all the other inmates of the Castle. But to them liberty was nothing new. The one most benefited by the change was Dydimus. He was now free as air. And, as his mother was still staying at the old inn, at Armine, her son paid her frequent visits there. There was no one now to scold, to humble, to taunt, to sneer at, and to punish him. The servants had always felt a sort of pity for Daft Dyddy.

Lady Armine's mental and bodily symptoms grew worse and worse. The physician dreaded softening of the brain, or permanent insanity. Osmond in prison, Lady Armine confined to her own darkened rooms, and, indeed, to her

state bed, with Beagle, treacherous, faithless, cruel Beagle, established as her nurse, the family party had now dwindled down to Daft Dyddy and Juliet Rivers.

The good vicar and his wife, whose visits were always longer and more frequent at the house of mourning than that of feasting, often spent the evening at Armine Castle.

Lord Castleville was occasionally of the party. His love for Juliet had survived the brilliancy of her bloom, the buoyancy of her spirits, the playful fascination and captivating coquetry of her manner. He knew now that she loved Osmond Armine, but he made sure Osmond would be found guilty, and hanged. He had written a poem, which was in the press. It was called "Love's Young Dream," and he fully expected it would make him the lion of the day ; and so he said to himself, as he corrected the proofs of a Dedication—"To Juliet,"—

“If a live dog is better than a dead lion, surely a live lion must be better than a dead dog. I hope Juliet will acknowledge that argument ere long, and that this poem will make me a lion, and make me the happiest of men.”

And so there were two “Cains” already reckoning on the death of Osmond Armine. Blind fools! who did not know and could never learn that TRUE LOVE, in a true woman’s breast, can never die till she resigns her breath to Him who made her heart, and filled it to an overflowing with undying affection!



## CHAPTER XII.

“Oh, memory, thou fond deceiver,  
Still importunate and vain,  
To former joys recurring ever,  
And turning all the past to pain !  
Thou, like the world, the oppressed oppressing,  
Thy smiles augment the wretch's woe,  
And he who wants each other blessing  
In thee shall ever find a foe.”

ONE long, sunny afternoon, towards the end of August, Osmond sat in his prison, plunged in deep and painful thought. The blue sky, the glorious sunshine, and the distant glimpse of a silver stream winding through green meads, brought back the memory of happy days of liberty and love !

“I wonder,” he said to himself, “that I have never heard one word of comfort or hope

from Juliet. In her place I should not be so prudent, so resigned. Can she, too, believe me guilty, and leave me to my fate?"

The tears rose to Osmond's now hollow eyes, and trickled down his wan, pale cheeks at this thought. He threw himself on his pallet, turned his face to the wall, and wished it were all over, and that he were at rest—even in a felon's grave. Just at this moment Hal Hart came to tell him that a Quaker lady, Mrs. Meeke, who spent a good deal of her time and money on prisons and prisoners (like her celebrated Sister of Mercy, Mrs. Fry), had asked and obtained leave to visit Mr. Osmond Armine in his cell.

"The good lady has brought a bundle of tracts for the soul, and a basket full of good things for the body," he said; "see her, sir. She may cheer you up a bit. You're many a cup too low."

Just as Hal Hart ceased speaking, the door

was thrown open, and two ladies were ushered into the cell. One was elderly, and very fat ; the other tall, slender, shadowy, pale, and very beautiful. Hart and the turnkey withdrew. Osmond rose to return the greeting of the elderly lady, who had drawn near his pallet.

“ Osmond—Osmond Armine ! do you not know me ? ” cried the young lady.

Osmond rushed forward.

That voice ! Oh ! that voice could belong to none but Juliet ! Juliet—has Juliet come at last ?

He opened his arms as he exclaimed,

“ My Juliet ! this is kind ! this is like you ! ”

And Juliet fell on his bosom, sobbing convulsively.

Mrs. Meeke, who, in spite of the severity of her manners, the strictness of rules of conduct, and the rigid simplicity of the Quaker

costume, had a very tender, kind, and even romantic disposition, felt her eyes fill with tears at this impassioned meeting between the lovers !

“ Poor young creatures !” she said to herself, “ ah ! how their fondness for each other brings back to my mind the dear old times when my poor departed Meeke first courted me ! Ah ! shall I ever forget the dreadful day when my poor Manasses, then only a junior clerk in father’s counting-house, was suspected of a forgery he was quite innocent of, and which proved afterwards to have been perpetrated by old Smiles, the very wretch who tried to fix it on my poor Manasses ? I remember he was shut up in the back parlour till the officers were sent for, or the lawyers, or some such people ; and I stole round to the window that opened into the garden, and handed him a tract and a plum-cake. That tract did him good, in the opinion of father

and the lawyer ; for when he was searched, the tract was found in his pocket. He had eaten the plum-cake, poor fellow ! Ah ! I never knew a moment's peace till Manasses was cleared ; and just as I felt then, that poor young thing feels now. Of course, it's much more dreadful to be accused of murder than forgery ; but forgery was a hanging matter, too, in those days—forty years ago. Ah ! I can feel for the poor young thing ! How pale and ill she looks, just as I looked when poor Manasses was in his trouble ! ”

Poor Mrs. Meeke flattered herself. Never in her best days had she borne the slightest resemblance to the now almost angelic beauty of the sorrowing Juliet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Meeke, not wishing to be any impediment to the interchange of thoughts and feeling between the lovers, turned her broad grey-silk back, over which hung a white shawl ;

and taking a tract out of her ample pocket, appeared to be absorbed in reading it.

Meanwhile, Juliet had related to Osmond all that had passed at Armine Castle since he had been removed. She felt, as she looked into his frank face, so certain of his entire innocence, that she did not hesitate to tell him of her search in the bed-post for the gold-handled knife.

When Juliet told Osmond that she had found the niche in the bed-post empty, and the "enchanted" knife gone, every particle of colour faded from his face, and a visible tremor shook his frame. "O Juliet!" he cried, "this is one of the worst things I have heard yet! The secret of the hiding-place of that hereditary weapon was, at least so I fully believed, known only to my mother, to you, and to myself! I cannot conceive it possible that any other person or persons could have learnt the secret of the hiding-

place of that knife. I was alone, and the doors were closed and locked, when my mother, even while my father still lay dead on the bed, revealed to me the secret of the hiding-place of that antique knife, and told me it was mine."

"And I remember," said Juliet, also, very white, cold, and trembling, "you closed and locked the doors of your late father's room, which had recently become your own, when you confided to me that secret."

"I did it, Juliet, because you had said I had never given you any proof of love or confidence; that I had never told you anything to test your power of keeping a secret. Do you remember?"

"I remember it well," said Juliet, blushing deeply, as she thought—"In all this dark tragedy, how clearly can I trace to my own imprudence, coquetry, and love of power, the circumstances most likely to tell against

him ! I once lived only to torment, and now would I gladly die to save !”

Juliet and Osmond were silent for some time. If the murder had indeed been done with that singular and antique weapon—and its disappearance from its hiding-place made it but too probable—on which of the three to whom the secret of its existence and abiding place were known did suspicion fall ? Must the foul, barbarous, and unnatural deed have been done by one of the three ? or was it possible that any spy or eavesdropper *could* have learnt the secret of the existence of that knife, and of its strange place of concealment ?

Juliet would have staked her life upon Osmond’s honour, Osmond’s humanity, Osmond’s innocence.

Osmond looked through the clear depths of Juliet’s large violet eyes into her very heart and brain. He saw his own image




there mirrored, as in a pure, pellucid lake. No dark and diabolical crime threw its shadow on her heart; no blood-red stain sullied the whiteness of her soul. No; they were certain of each other.

And if across the mind of each a hideous thought darkly flitted, both resolutely drove it away, with a shudder, as a loathsome thing, which they would fain shake off and crush under their feet.

To Juliet's account of her interview with the Ghoul Osmond listened with intense interest, not unmixed with horror at the thought of the dangers his devoted girl had braved for him. He would fain have made her promise never again to venture into the presence of one whom he considered as a dangerous monomaniac.

Juliet evaded giving him the promise he would have exacted. She had made up her mind to visit the Ghoul again. He had



said he was sure of finding the blood-stained clothes of the murderer. He had already found the knife. Those clothes, Juliet felt certain, would furnish a clue. They might fix the guilt on the real murderer. They might clear the fame and name of Osmond (in that case) Earl of Armine.

"I do not care what becomes of me if Osmond *is* to perish on the scaffold," she said to herself, growing livid and convulsed at the thought. "In that case I would bless the Ghoul if he sent me out of this world, and across the dark ocean by my darling's side. And if, by risking my life, I can save *his*, what rapture for me, even in the risk!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Hal Hart came in about this time to tell the ladies that they had only about ten minutes longer to stay.

Mrs. Meeke then proposed that they should join in prayer. Osmond and Juliet found

great comfort in the words of faith and resignation with which this good and holy woman guided their thoughts, and hopes, and entreaties to the throne of grace.

The next day Osmond was to see his counsel for the first time. Mrs. Meeke did not forget to pray that the lawyer's mind might be enlightened and his hands strengthened by the God of justice.

The lovers parted with a lingering embrace, which Mrs. Meeke, discovering at that moment that her shoe was untied, pretended not to see. The good soul cordially shook hands with Osmond, and with gentle force led Juliet away.

When they were gone, Hal Hart, while bringing in Osmond's tea, said in a low voice,

“Hurrah!—hurrah! Good news—good news, Master Osmond! Good news, my lord! Dear friend, old schoolfellow, champion, young lion, good news!”

“What news?” asked Osmond, smiling faintly.

“Roger Ruff is in Exeter, yours heart and soul—a host in himself! Hurrah!”

## CHAPTER XIII.

His heart was form'd for softness—warp'd to wrong,  
Betrayed too early, and beguiled too long.

BYRON.

THE Ghoul, after his interview with Juliet Rivers, retired, as we have said, to a sort of dormitory which he had hollowed out in the ground. There it was his custom to sleep away the long summer days, or the brief winter ones, as the case might be.

The reader knows that there was a general belief that a subterranean passage had at one time been made, and frequently used, between the Castle and the abbey. The Ghoul, who seemed, even when first he established himself in his “freehold,” and commenced his strange

and mysterious career on the marshes and among the Haunted Rocks, seemed to have a wonderful and perfect knowledge of the bearings (the geography, in short) of Armine and its neighbourhood. A scooped-out hole underground, this was his nest, and communicating with it by a flight of rude steps, almost as an outer cellar might have done, and in which he chose to sleep, was a rude door, through which he was able to grope his way, on all-fours, to the ruined Abbey, and thence along the subterranean passage of which tradition spoke so confidently, to the very Castle itself.

This passage had a secret unsuspected opening in the turret in which was Juliet's bed-chamber, and the nursery of the murdered child. The secret of this opening, just under the winding staircase, which plays so important a part in this story, was known to none of the present generation but the Ghoul himself.

It had been the chief employment and amusement of his mysterious life, since he first came to his "freehold," to clear away, inch by inch, the stones, the loose earth, and other rubbish which, in the course of time, had completely blocked up the once well-kept, neatly-bricked subterranean passage between the Castle of the proud Earls of Armine and the Abbey of the jolly monks of St. Cuthbert. It is probable that the strange sounds which had scared away even the crab-hunters and shrimp-boys, and which superstition averred were the wails and shrieks of ghosts wandering underground between the Castle and the Abbey, were, in reality, the strange noises with which the Ghoul often vented his rage! There were memories which occasionally flashed, like forked lightning, across the midnight of his mind, at the scorching light of which he would yell and shriek aloud.

There were others to which he responded

with a long, low wail; sometimes thoughts occurred to him which he greeted with a discordant, eltrich laugh; and occasionally he would howl like a wild beast that had escaped to the jungles, with the hunter's spear sticking fast in his quivering flesh.

Of course, if he uttered the notes of this gamut of mental misery while working underground at the subterranean passage, it was no marvel that the ignorant and superstitious should shun the place whence they issued. Nor would they have been much reassured had they discovered that these unearthly sounds proceeded from the Ghoul of the Marsh.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Ghoul, after his interview with Juliet, slept as usual—the sleep of a sated wild boar after a full meal of acorns—until the tower clock of the Castle and that of the village church struck twelve. He then rose,



stretched himself, rubbed his eyes, groped his way back into his hut, through the chinks of the rude door of which the moonbeams streamed.

He threw open that door, and stood for some time looking on the wild extent of marshes sleeping beneath the bright moon, and by her flooded with silver, and then he turned and looked at the moonlit sea.

"The sea! the sea!" he said, for he always talked to himself; "a good ride on my chargers, the waves! They know their rider, as the poet says. They shall bear me to Point Dangerous to-night! I saw a coil of rope, last week, on the sand there, and I must have it! I want it for my works—my grand works, my rock-works—and I'll have it too! And then the hunt, the hunt among the rocks for the blood-stained clothes! I'll wash 'em and dry 'em in the moon—what laundress bleaches linen

like the Moon?—and then I'll wear them, for they're good clothes, bonny, useful clothes! I promised the brave girl, who doesn't fear the Ghoul, that I'd find them, and so I will. And now for the sea!

“ ‘The sea, the open sea,  
The fair, the fresh, the ever free!’ ”

He sang in a loud bass voice, and in a manner which proved he had a good ear and some knowledge of music. As he sang, he made his way to the Haunted Rocks. There, in one of his outer caves, he divested himself of his Crusoe-like attire, and, with a wild cry, rushed into the sea and swam boldly, fearlessly, and with wondrous strength and power, his shaggy head and broad white back occasionally lighted up by the gleam of the moon. Or, when he turned and floated awhile on his back, his broad chest thickly covered with reddish hair, met the calm eye of the chaste Diana.

After swimming for about an hour, he reached Point Dangerous. He secured the coil of rope, which was the object of his midnight voyage to that spot; and he then, with the tide in his favour (it had been dead against him as he set out), returned with his prize to the Haunted Rocks.

Having resumed his hare-skin jacket and rabbit-skin unhintables, the Ghoul commenced his hunt among the rocks, having first carefully hidden up his coil of rope. For two hours he carefully examined every crevice and cleft, every hole and fissure.

"No luck to-night," he said, "and I'm hungry, very hungry—never say die! I'll find them yet! I promised the brave girl I would, and I will! But now I'm hungry; now I've a wolf here!"

And he rubbed his stomach.

"And the wolf wants a rabbit, and he shall have one, too. But what have we here? A

stocking, a white stocking ! and stained with blood !” he added, examining it by the moonlight ; “ as sure as I’m the Ghoul, this has dropped from the bundle of blood-stained clothes ! Ha ! ha ! this is something to show the brave girl ! I’ll wash it, and wear it too ; it’s long since I’ve worn a stocking. Each leg shall have a turn at it. Ha ! ha ! It’s marked, too, or has been ; but some one has tried to burn it ; I can’t make out the mark. No matter, it’s mine now ; all waifs and strays belong to me. I’m the Lord of the Manor, of the Marshes and the Haunted Rocks. Hurray ! hurray ! who seeks shall find. I’ll seek, and I’ll find. Be still, wolf ! you shall have a feed on cold duck and cold rabbit. Ay, here we are ! and now to breakfast. Be quiet, wolf ! don’t gnaw me ! I’ll give you something else to gnaw ; down, good wolf !”

## CHAPTER XIV.

Like to a gentle sunbeam, softly stealing  
Through the harsh grating of some prison home.

ANON.

WE must now explain how it came to pass that Juliet Rivers was enabled to obtain access to Osmond Armine's cell, in the disguise of a Quaker, or Friend (the terms are indeed synonymous), and under the protection of one of the kindest-hearted of that admirable sect.

Mrs. Meeke was the widow of a very wealthy cornfactor at Exeter. Old Manasses Meeke was a leading member of the Society of Friends, and his ancestors had for many generations occupied the same position. They

had lived in the same large, plain, handsome house ; they had led the same sedate, virtuous, regular, simple life ; they had bought and sold at the same market ; they had worshipped in the same plain meeting-house. The name of Meeke for more than a century had headed the same charities. They gave freely, and proved the truth of the text—"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth."

They *did* increase in wealth, influence, and importance. But they did not increase in inward pride or outward pomp. The lords of Armine Castle had for many generations dealt largely with the Meekes of Mill House. The Meekes rented certain fields and farms of the Lords of Armine. A sort of friendly intercourse had sprung up between the families of the Castle and of Mill House. Whenever the ladies of Armine drove into Exeter to shop, instead of going to an hotel they put up at the Mill House.

A substantial luncheon was always prepared; and wide as was the difference of rank between the Countess of Armine and the Quaker corn-factor's wife, yet, as there was neither affectation on one side, nor vulgarity on the other, these little visits were agreeable to both.

It was thus with the Armines and the Meekes of a hundred years ago, and thus it had been with the Lady Armine to whom the reader has been introduced, and with the kindly Quaker whom we beheld in the last chapter visiting Osmond Armine in Exeter jail, and enabling Juliet Rivers to see her lover without making herself the talk of the world—"the observed of all observers."

Friend Meeke had one daughter. A fair and saintly creature was this Tryfena Meeke. She had been, in childhood and early youth, occasionally a playfellow of Juliet Rivers and Lord Armine's boys, when they accompanied

the Earl and Countess in their visits to Exeter.

The Countess of Armine, stern and haughty as she was to most people (whether her equals or inferiors), was affable and kindly to the good Quakers. It would have been impossible to be proud or haughty to a couple so simple, so hospitable, so earnest, and so unaffected, as the old corn-factor, his virtuous wife, and the pale, moon-eyed, quiet—almost seraphic—Tryfena.

Since the deaths of her husband and her two eldest sons, the Countess of Armine had not once visited Exeter and the Meekes of Mill House. Mrs. Meeke herself, at that time a widow, had been absent for a twelve-month, on account of the extreme delicacy of her daughter's health. When she returned to Mill House, the mysterious child-murder at Armine Castle was the universal theme, and Osmond Armine was in prison.

Friend Meeke, who had always felt a deep



interest in all the Armine family, and especially in Osmond, heard the dreadful news with horror. She immediately ordered her plain, dark green brougham and pair, and drove over to Armine Castle. Lady Armine was in her darkened chamber. Beagle was established there as head-nurse. On being applied to, to allow Mrs. Meeke to see the Countess, Beagle refused, saying the doctors had strictly forbidden her to allow her ladyship to see any visitors.

Juliet, however, tried to atone to Mrs. Meeke for this disappointment, by receiving her in the most cordial and most affectionate manner. She wept on the matronly bosom of the good Quaker, who had known her from a child. She told her every particular, even the most minute, of this most dreadful tragedy. She expressed, in language that brought tears to the Quaker's eyes, and a flush to her cheek, her unshaken confidence in Osmond. She

knew from conviction that he was innocent ; and she added that one fervent, ever-haunting longing of her heart was to be enabled to visit him in his unmerited disgrace, degradation, and distress, as she had some things to tell him, from which she thought he might imbibe a little of that cordial—Hope.

“ But,” added the poor girl, sobbing wildly, “ how can I, friendless, unaided, and alone—how can I visit a young man like Osmond ? How can I, as a modest maiden, do anything that will draw upon me the eyes of a whole world of bitter slanderers, and make me the theme of every tongue and of a paragraph in every newspaper—yet I know I could comfort him ; and to think that he may fancy himself neglected, forgotten, abandoned, perhaps, robs me of peace by day and of rest by night ; and, indeed, I often feel, dear friend, as if I must either die or go mad, unless I can see poor Osmond !”

“ My child, my poor child, friend Juliet !” said the good Quaker ; “ I can enter into thy feelings ; and while I agree with thee that it were not well for a discreet maiden to expose herself to the remarks and slanders of the carnally-minded, yet if thou hast aught to say that can comfort friend Osmond in his captivity, I will enable thee to see him without any risk to thy maiden modesty and thy spotless fame.”

“ Dear friend, true friend ! soul of mercy and sympathy !” said Juliet ; “ how can you do this ?”

“ I have already applied to the governor of the prison to allow me to visit Osmond Armine,” said Mrs. Meeke ; “ but, indeed, friend Juliet, that form was not necessary. I am free, as thou knowest, of all the prisons and reformatories in the county. Still, as this is a very peculiar case, the accused of so lofty a rank, and the orders so strict concerning

him, I wrote, and have obtained permission to visit him. I had planned taking Tryfena with me ; it is that dear child's chief pleasure to visit the widow and the orphan, the sick and the captive ; and this goodly youth, Osmond Armine, often her playfellow in childhood and her friend in youth, his captivity she would love to cheer ; but I have not spoken to her of this visit to Osmond Armine, for her cheek is so pale, and her hand is so thin and hot, I fear, though she complains not, she is far from well. She might take cold, for the wind is in the east. Or the excitement might be too much for her ; but come back with me to the Mill House, neighbour, this evening, and to-morrow thou shalt array thyself in my poor Tryfena's dress, shawl, and bonnet—thou and she, neighbour, are much of an height—and with her brown gossamer veil thou shalt visit Osmond Armine with me, and none shall doubt that thou art even my

own daughter. Yea, all shall believe the young maiden leaning on my arm is, in good sooth, my daughter Tryfena Meeke."

Gladly did Juliet comply with this proposal. She had no one to consult now. Lady Armine, that once active and potent tyrant, was become a complete cypher in her own castle. Even Dydimus was from home when Mrs. Meeke arrived, so that she could not inform him of her intended visit to Mill House. It seemed very strange to her to be so free.

Lady Armine had treated Juliet as a child, and as a hated child.

All was done exactly as Mrs. Meeke proposed. The good Quaker, although, as she said, averse to all disguises and play-acting, saw no harm in Juliet's borrowing Tryfena's garb, to enable her safely to go forth on an errand of mercy.

Tryfena was delighted to assist in an act of kindness. She helped with her long, taper,

almost transparent fingers, to array Juliet in the plain grey silk dress, the snowy kerchief, the black silk Quaker bonnet and white shawl, in which Juliet looked pretty enough to have made, like Sarah Lightfoot, a conquest of a monarch in his youth. Tryfena's pale cheek flushed as she begged Juliet to remember her to Osmond Armine, and to tell him that he had her prayers. No sooner had her mother and Juliet set off in the dark green chariot for the jail, than Tryfena sank on her knees and prayed long and fervently for Osmond's deliverance. She tried to pray for his happy union with Juliet Rivers, but something in her breast rebelled against that prayer. She could not subdue herself to utter it, and rising from her knees, she threw herself, weeping and blushing, into an arm-chair; and covering her face with her hands, she said to herself:—

“Why cannot I pray as fervently that he may be happy with Juliet Rivers as I can that

he may be justified before all men, and borne in triumph from that dreary and degrading captivity? Am I still so weak, or is this miserable passion still so strong? Casuists tell us Love cannot exist without hope, yet what hope have I ever had? None. And yet I cannot remember the time when I did not love thee, Osmond! But, I thank Heaven! this weakness, this folly, this madness, is known only to my own sad heart, and I feel it will not be long before it is hidden with me where none—not even my own fond mother—can ever guess that Tryfena Meeke has died of love for Osmond Armine. But, no,” she added, dashing away her tears, “I must not sit here idle, indulging in this luxury of woe, this wild romance of passion. My time, I feel it, will be short; but while I live, I have work to do, duties to perform, sick neighbours to tend, poor ones to help, widows to visit, orphans to comfort! These are the last tears I

will shed for self and selfish passion. I know what I have to do, and I will do it !”

So saying, she roused herself, and, putting on her shawl and bonnet, went forth on her round of Christian duties, while that scene passed in the prison between Mrs. Meeke, Juliet, and Osmond, with which the reader is already acquainted.



## CHAPTER XV.

What should it be that thus their faith can bind?  
The power of thought—the magic of the mind.

BYRON.

It was so strange to Juliet to feel herself at liberty to act for herself, that she could scarcely realise the unwonted sensation. It is said that those who have long been heavily ironed, fancy they feel the weight of their chains even when they have been entirely removed. It has been remarked, too, that the movements of those who have been long restrained by handcuffs and leg gyves, long continue to move as if still fettered. And so it is with the spirit.

A constant and undefined dread of being

checked, scolded, rebuked, and coerced, as she had ever been by the Countess of Armine, imparted a degree of uncertainty and timidity to Juliet's manner. Never having been allowed to make up her own mind, or to decide and act according to her own wishes, she scarcely knew what to say when Mrs. Meeke kindly pressed her to remain for a day or two with her at Mill House, in order to pay another visit to Osmond Armine.

"Thou hast broken the ice, now, neighbour Juliet," said this warm-hearted Quakeress. "And the dear lad, who's as innocent of this foul deed as thou art, or as my poor Fena herself, will refresh himself at the sweet springs of thy sympathy, now that cold frozen crust is broken through. Besides, it seems to me he is paralysed by the weight of woe and disgrace that has fallen like an avalanche on his young brain. I did not hear him allude either to his counsel or his defence. I must

plainly tell thee, friend Juliet, I think he is losing very precious time."

"Alas! he has had no one to advise him," said Juliet. "I doubt not he has felt as if the life that no one on earth seemed to value, has become worthless, even in his own eyes."

"I do believe," said Mrs. Meeke, "the poor youth has not yet realized his own peril."

"His peril, mother!" said Fena, in her soft, low, musical voice; "surely thee dost not think that there is a jury of Englishmen, or a judge on the bench, who can really find Osmond—Mr. Armine, I mean—Guilty!"

"They are no respecters of persons, Fena," said her mother.

"But they dare not condemn the innocent and the good," urged Fena, the tears sparkling in her eyes, and a blush suffusing her pale face.

"The jury, my child, will decide solely according to the evidence, and *that*, I grieve to

say, is, in the present state of the case, such, that unless Osmond secures the service of some advocate who can find a clue to this dark labyrinth of treachery and falsehood, and unravel this blood-stained web of crime and shame, he will be found guilty by the jury, and will be condemned and sentenced by his earthly judge ; though I tell thee, Fena, I firmly believe his Heavenly Judge will acquit him, and send His angels to receive his spirit, if he fall a sacrifice to bloodthirsty laws and circumstantial evidence. My Fena !" cried Mrs. Meeke, in wild alarm, "what ails thee, my child ?" she added, wildly rushing to her daughter's side, and catching her in her arms, as she fell back in a swoon.

Yes, the gentle Fena had fainted at the terrible suggestions which, with more earnestness than tact, the good Quakeress had imparted to her youthful hearer's mind.

Juliet, on the contrary, felt her spirit rise

to meet the momentous occasion. The imminent peril of one so much dearer to her than herself, roused her to think, to act, to resolve!

“Soft and gentle creatures, like Tryfena Meeke,” she said to herself, “who love Os-  
mone Armine as the friend and companion of many years, and who doubt his guilt, and shudder at the thought of a violent death for any one they have known, may sink powerless on the floor, or weakly weep and wail over the fate they see no way of averting; but I—I, his own true love, the maiden of his bosom, the choice of his heart—I, who love him only as woman loves but once in that long, passionate dream she calls her life—I, whom he has chosen from the whole female world, to be all the world to him—I, who *know*, who *feel*, that he is as innocent as the murdered child himself—I *will* not weep, I *will* not faint, I *will* not die, I will never weary of efforts to save and serve him, to clear his name and fame,

and to justify him before an applauding and repentant world, by discovering the real perpetrator of this foulest of murders. To Osmond's cause I will devote my life and energies, so help me Heaven!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Tryfena Meeke's swoon was so protracted as to cause serious alarm to her anxious mother. All ordinary home remedies having failed to restore animation, Dr. Paley, as he was called in Exeter, was sent for.

Our friend Paul Paley was the doctor in question. His father had virtually retired from practice, and Paul held in his strong, steady young hand, the threads of countless lives, and the peace of numerous homes. The Paleys were old friends of the Meekes. Paul had frequently prescribed for the delicate, often-ailing Tryfena. Paul Paley's experience and skill enabled him in a very short time to restore Tryfena to life and consciousness.

With truly scientific concentrativeness he gave his whole attention to his patient, until the faint rose tints had returned to her lips and cheeks, and she had opened her eyes, and recognized her kind young doctor. She then sighed deeply, smiled faintly, extended her white, beautiful hand to Paul Paley, and murmured,

“Dearest mother, I am better now.”

Paul Paley, having placed Tryfena in a recumbent position on the large comfortable sofa, turned to reassure Mrs. Meeke, and recognized, to his surprise, in the tall, graceful Quakeress, as she had seemed to him as she bent over Tryfena, the unforgotten and beautiful Euphrosyne of old times at Armine Castle—the glowing Hebe of his early, though secret worship—Juliet Rivers!

Juliet, who knew that Paul Paley was a devoted friend of Osmond's, cordially extended her hand.

Mrs. Meeke's comfortable and tempting tea-table was set out by this time. She was the very spirit of hospitality. She invited Paul Paley to sit down with herself and Juliet, and he gladly consented. Of course, from talking of old times at Armine, hair-breadth 'scapes by flood and field, perils among the rocks, terrors on the marshes, and the delightful accident of being one whole day lost in woods, the conversation naturally glided on to Osmond Armine and the mysterious child-murder at the Castle.

Juliet and the listening Tryfena were delighted to find that Paul Paley was quite as thoroughly convinced of Osmond's innocence as they themselves were. He spoke of his old schoolfellow with an enthusiasm that flushed Tryfena's pale cheek and blanched Juliet's. He comforted Mrs. Meeke and the girls with the assurance that the best counsel in the kingdom were retained on Osmond's side. He



informed them that the next noon was appointed for Osmond Armine's first interview with his counsel. He advised them to postpone their second visit for a few days, remarking that Osmond was in a very nervous, low, restless, and excitable state, and that he thought it all-important to keep him as tranquil as possible during his interviews with his counsel.

Mrs. Meeke agreeing to act by the young surgeon's advice, Juliet, who felt as if she were doing something wrong in absenting herself from Armine Castle without leave, begged Mrs. Meeke to allow her to return thither after breakfast the next day, and to permit her to visit him again, when Mr. Paley thought it prudent for his patient to see them.

The kind Quakeress, who did not like to leave her still ailing Tryfena, lent Juliet her carriage to take her back to the Castle.

Juliet was not sorry to be alone. Her heart

and brain were full of Osmond, and of plans to prove him innocent, and of plots to save his life, even if he were found guilty. So entirely was Juliet absorbed by her thoughts and schemes, that she did not perceive in the high road, as the carriage drew near the gates of the park, Daft Dyddy, pale as death, and his eyes red with weeping, sitting on a bank, which commanded a view of the road for a considerable distance.

When he perceived Juliet, who had resumed her own black velvet hat, dress, and mantle, he rushed wildly down the steep bank, in spite of his lameness, and, with a wild cry of joy, darted to the carriage window.

Juliet ordered the coachman to stop. The footman, at her command, opened the chariot door, and in scrambled Daft Dyddy!

"Oh, Juliet! dear, dear Juliet!" he cried, "where have you been all yesterday and all

night, and so many long hours of this dreary day. I have been up all night watching for you. I feared you were gone away, and would never return. Oh, Juliet! tell me where you have been?"

But Juliet had been warned by Mrs. Meeke and Paul Paley to keep her visit to Osmond Armine a close secret, lest it should transpire and get into the papers after all.

She therefore tried to put off Daft Dyddy with excuses, about wanting a little change, having some small matters to see to, wishing to call on Tryfena Meeke, and so on.

"Ah, Juliet!" said Dyddy, "you cannot deceive me. What care you for change or shopping or paying visits at such a time as this!—but no matter, it is such a joy to get you safe back again, to hear the music of your dear voice, to see the heaven of your soft eyes and sweet face, that I care not where you have been, or what you have done. You

are here once more, and Purgatory has suddenly become Paradise!"

"Well may they call you Daft Dyddy," said Juliet, smiling, in spite of herself, at the ecstasy of her companion, but not quite pleased to hear from him expressions which, to her ear and heart, were only welcome when uttered by "the one loved voice."

Chilled by Juliet's silence and reserve, Daft Dyddy repressed his rapture, and, in a few moments, the good Quakeress's carriage deposited them at the front entrance to the Castle.

Luncheon was, as usual, spread out in the old dining-hall. Daft Dyddy, as soon as Juliet had taken off her hat and cloak, led her to the top of the table. The table was a small one, or rather the large one contracted to a small size, as the servants knew that there were only two to prepare for—Daft Dyddy leaving Juliet at the top of the table,

limped back to the other end, and took his place directly opposite to her.

“Exactly as if she were mine, all mine—my bride—mine only, mine for ever!—if we were man and wife, we should sit thus!” he thought.

Juliet, who had scarcely taken anything for breakfast, eat mechanically of the cold chicken and tongue he carved for her and sent her by the footman in attendance. She bowed with an absent smile as she took the glass of wine he ordered the servant to pour out for her, pledging her himself the while with a full bumper and a full heart.

Full of pride, full of triumph, and full of passionate love and wild hope, was the long-crushed and desolate heart of Daft Dyddy, as he and Juliet sate opposite to each other at that table; Daft Dyddy in the very place which had been exclusively appropriated to

Osmond Armine ever since his father's and his eldest brother's deaths.

In this old baronial hall, with its huge cavernous grate, its dark richly-carved oak, its sideboards, its music-gallery, there were several long windows, partly of stained glass. These windows reached within two feet of the floor, and looked on a terraced walk.

Just as Daft Dyddy raised to his lips the glass of wine he was dedicating to Juliet, a loud knocking, followed by the smashing of a pane of one of the windows, caused Juliet and himself to look round.

Both started to their feet, looking pale as death, and trembling violently, as if they had seen a spectre, and a spectre indeed it was. The spectre of the former self of the stern tyrant of both those young beings—Lady Armine!

The physicians had ordered that she should walk out twice daily, for an hour each time.

Beagle, her head-nurse, and a woman who assisted her, were to accompany her Ladyship. The terrace-walk beneath the Hall windows was fixed upon as being at once level, secluded, and shaded from the noon-day sun.

Lady Armine was not actually insane, but she was constantly under the influence of mind-disturbing opiates. She was as strange as morose, as fierce as irritable, and as unmanageable as if she had really been demented.

Some evil spirit prompted the wretched Countess while pacing (sore against her will) up and down the terrace-walk, to look suddenly in at one of the windows. When she beheld Juliet Rivers and Daft Dyddy seated, like the lord and lady of the Castle, opposite to each other in the seats appropriated exclusively, since her husband's and eldest son's death, to herself and her favourite, her

- idolized Osmond, a fit of ungovernable rage took possession of a mind weakened by despair and darkened by opium.

At the violent noise she made, and at the sudden smashing of a large pane of ruby-coloured glass, Juliet and Dyddy, as we have said, started up, and beheld, dressed in a long black silk wrapper, and a hood or calash of the same material, and whose sable hue contrasted forcibly with the ghastly pallor of her Hindoo features—the face and form of the Countess convulsed with passion.

“Look at them!” she cried, shaking at Juliet and the quaking, pale Dyddy the fist from which the blood streamed—for she had cut it severely in her attack on the window—“look at the bold bastard and the beggarly shopkeeper’s brat! Look at the hussy daring to sit in my chair; and worse still, the lame, limping, illegitimate lout daring to squat his misshapen self in the seat sacred to my angel



boy, my Osmond! my son! Where is my son? I want my son—(she had forgotten all recent occurrences)—send Osmond to me! and tell him to look at them, the wretches, drinking of my cup, eating of my bread, thrusting themselves into places sacred to my son and me! Oh, let me loose, loose—let me loose! that I may brain him with his own bar-sinister, and drag her through the dust, the dirt whence she sprang, by the hair of her low-born, plebeian head! Let me go!” she cried, with flaming Indian eyes, and foam on her lips. “Let me get at the traitors, the upstarts!”

“Now, I ain’t a-going to do no such thing, my lady, I can tell you. You ain’t a going to fly at nobody, so don’t you hope it! They ain’t a-doing no harm; they were only sitting quietly down and eating and drinking their lunches—which it’s time I had mine and you yours, Hannar—which it’s a stewed

rump steak and hoyster sauce. And you, my lady, you shall have your panada, that you takes to so kindly." And she laughed.

Beagle, like all mean people invested with power, revealed a very tyrannical, overbearing nature. She had grown very insolent and even cruel to her wretched lady, and mentioned the panada because she knew that Lady Armine held that mawkish mess in utter detestation.

Juliet, who had a very generous nature, could not bear to see one, once so mighty and so terrible—even in Beagle's eyes, as the Countess of Armine—fallen so low and made the scoff and the jeer of that sordid woman and her assistant "Hannar." She drew near the window. Daft Dyddy followed, keeping close behind her. His dread of Lady Armine was much lessened since he had seen her made a butt of by Beagle.

"For shame, Beagle," said Juliet; "how

dare you speak so impertinently to her ladyship. I have a great mind to report you to the doctors, and to have you discharged."

"It's too bad of you," said Daft Dyddy, hoping to gain favour in Juliet's eyes by a show of spirit.

"Oh! that's the return you make for my taking your part, is it, Miss Juliet and Master Dyddy? I'll let my lady wreak her wengeance on you both, next time, and no mistake!"

"Juliet Rivers," said Lady Armine, with a calm more terrible than her fury, "go to your room, and remain there. I can reprove my servants myself; and punish you, too, who are very little better, and quite as plebeian as they. As for you, Dydymus, I have a task for you. Come you out at once, and bring with you the chaise in which you wheel my grandson. You shall wheel me in it all round the grounds. Come this instant!"

“Ay, you’d better,” said Beagle; “I’d not have let her made you do it, if it hadn’t a-been for your imperance and gratitude to me, a-flying at me for taking your part; and now I shall be very glad to see you harnessed like the donkey you is, to that chair again, which once upon a time I did used to feel for you; but mind, I hope my lady’ll not spare the whip. So, come on.”

Dydymus dared not refuse.

The chaise was found in its usual place, but turned over, and rubbish, dust, and loose earth heaped upon it. With the pertinacity belonging to her morbid state of mind, Lady Armine compelled Daft Dyddy to raise it, to clean it, to place himself between the shafts, and to draw her round the grounds.

She was wasted to a mere shadow, poor wretch! and she wore no hoops or crinoline, so she sat in the little car as easily as the

child had done. Very furiously she lashed Daft Dyddy with the long whip; and very loudly laughed the while Beagle and her attendant Hannah.

At length, exhausted by her rage and the fatigue she had undergone, Lady Armine was seized with a shivering fit; and as they were at that time near the Castle, Beagle and Hannah lifted Lady Armine out of the little chaise, and carried her off to her apartments.

Daft Dyddy ventured his rage in kicking at the little gaudy carriage; his tears flowing fast as he did so. Indeed, he maltreated it so furiously, that one of its wheels came off; when, terrified at what he had done, he dragged it hastily away to its own little shed in the flower-garden, and rushed out into the park, and thence to the wild sea-shore, where the foaming waves, beating themselves to pieces against the rocks, seemed to sympa-

thise with the wild war of his passions and his will, against the iron rule of his haughty and merciless patroness.

## CHAPTER XVI.

The thunder came: that bolt hath blasted both  
The granite's firmness and the lily's growth.

BYRON.

AFTER her interview with Lady Armine, Juliet, with an instinct of obedience to the tyrant of her childhood, retired to her own chamber. She remained there all the evening; and, refusing dinner or tea, she was still pondering on Osmond's perils and her own plans, when Dinah came up to go to bed, as usual, at eleven o'clock.

Dinah was soon fast asleep; and, just as midnight struck by the tower clock, Hubert began to howl piteously, and to bark with

a peculiar bark, indicative of an excitement and impatience, which would not let Juliet rest.

In her agony and suspense, she had learned to attach a sort of importance to Hubert's manifestations of feeling.

"What," she said to herself, "if the instinct of poor Osmond's faithful bloodhound should be more potent to save him, than my reason! What if he who found the body of the murdered child, might if released from his chain, discover the clothes of the murderer! Again that howl! I will release him. He shall go with me to the rocks; who knows what we may find in this bright moonlight night?"

Softly, and without disturbing Dinah, the devoted and excited girl hurried down the winding turret stair, withdrew the bolts of the door, entered the garden, released Hubert from his chain, and followed him as he bounded



away to the sea-shore, and to the Haunted Rocks.

For some time Juliet wandered along, not heeding the tide, which was rapidly approaching. She was intent only on watching the movements of Hubert, who paused to sniff and whine at many a cleft and hollow in the rocks. Suddenly Hubert whined, howled, and pulled fiercely at Juliet's dress. She looked round in wild alarm, and saw that the waves were closing in upon her. The next moment they dashed over her feet. The rocks beneath which she stood were not merely perpendicular, but overhanging. On—on—on came the engulfing waves!

Juliet, with a wild prayer, remembered the perils of the Haunted Rocks, and gave herself up for lost, when, suddenly, from above, a rope, with a noose at its end, descended within her grasp. She slipped the noose round her waist. A strong pull from above

brought her through the midnight air, and landed her safely on a ledge of rock.

Hubert, seeing her safe, swam round to a point where he found a footing, and was able to climb the rocks, and scamper round to the rescued Juliet.

A few minutes later, from the very top of the over-hanging rock, a man was seen descending fleet and sure-footed as a mountain goat. He held in his hand one end of the cord which had saved Juliet's life. He approached her with wild screams and yells of joy. The moon at this moment came from behind a cloud. And Juliet found herself face to face with her preserver—the GHOUL!

At any other time Juliet would have been terrified at the sudden appearance of the Ghoul. On the very verge of those precipitous rocks she meets him calmly now, while the full moon (rendering the scene almost as light, but much more ghostly than by day),

reveals his large prominent eyes glaring upon her, and a grin of triumph distending his moustached lips. Juliet, however, who had just escaped from a violent and horrible death, and who had perceived at a glance that it was the Ghoul who had so bravely and adroitly rescued her from the engulfing waves, felt at the moment of meeting him again, nothing but lively gratitude towards her preserver, the mysterious recluse of the marshes.

“What! it’s you, brave girl?” said the Ghoul. “I thought as much—none but you would venture alone among the Haunted Rocks by moonlight, and you have very nearly paid the penalty of your rashness with your life.”

“I had forgotten,” said Juliet, “how rapidly the tide flows in upon those rocks.”

“Ah! wasn’t it lucky, brave wench, that last night I swam out to Point Dangerous, to

get a coil of rope I had seen there on the strand last week? I wanted it to draw up a huge fragment of rock, to conceal a cave of mine, not far off, and so I swam out for it; and now it has enabled me to save your life. I couldn't have dined without that rope; and I'm so glad—for you're a brave girl—will you come to supper, eh?"

"No, thank you," said Juliet; "I must get back as quick as I can. But, tell me, have you found the clothes?—the blood-stained clothes?"

"No, no! not yet, and I've had a good hunt, too, but I've found nothing but this," and he threw out one leg, on which he had drawn the stocking he had found, blood-stained as it was.

"See!" he said, pulling it off, "it has had a mark, but some one has tried to burn it out."

"Will you let me have it?" said Juliet, ex-

tending her hand ; “ one stocking is of no use to you.”

“ Now, of what use is it to *you* ?” said the Ghoul, looking very cunning, and placing his finger on the side of his long, spiky nose ; “ no, no, I’ll keep it. It’s a good stocking, a bonnie stocking, a useful stocking, and each leg shall have a turn at it till I find its fellow.”

“ Will you let me look at it ?” said Juliet, hoping she might be able to discover to whom it had belonged, and to decipher the not quite obliterated mark.

“ You may look at it,” said the Ghoul ; “ but don’t attempt to take it away, or over you go !” and he took the knife from his belt, and pointed with it to the sea below. “ Fair play’s a jewel, and it’s playing with edge tools.”

Juliet thought so too, and she fervently wished herself safe back in her own room, and

out of the dangerous presence of this monomaniac.

Hubert, the bloodhound, who had conceived a great affection for the Ghoul, was poking his cold, moist, black muzzle into the recluse's hand, whining and barking, and standing on his hind legs, with his forepaws on the Ghoul's shoulder.

"I like the dog," said the Ghoul, "and the dog likes me—let me have him."

"He is not mine," faltered Juliet.

"Then you've no more right to him than I have," shouted the Ghoul; "I shall keep him; he'll be company—good company. Men deceive, women betray, but dogs are faithful unto death."

Juliet was afraid to dispute the will of this wild, mysterious creature.

She thought to herself, "Hubert will surely find an opportunity of getting away, and of returning to his home—all dogs have that

instinct. Perhaps if I object to his keeping him now, in his insane rage he may pitch us both over the rocks into the sea."

"Do you live at Armine Castle, my girl?" suddenly asked the Ghoul.

"Yes," faltered Juliet; "and I must hasten back to it at once."

"Not till you have answered my question," screeched the Ghoul. "The Countess of Armine—does she still live?"

"She does."

"Is she still beautiful, with that soft Hindoo beauty that coils round man's heart like the snakes of her clime? Has she still those black gazelle-like eyes, those raven tresses, that soft, olive skin, with its delicate peach-blossom bloom—those proud and chiselled features, that lithe form? Is she still stately as Juno, winning as the Queen of Love, mocking as the hyæna, crafty and cruel

as the tiger, and deadly as the cobra?  
Answer me, girl!"

"She is very ill, and very unhappy, and she is growing old now. She is quite a wreck," said Juliet.

"Can she—can Irene St. Aubyn—or, rather, Irene, Countess of Armine, grow old?" said the Ghoul, fiercely. "Can those glorious eyes shed tears and wax dim? Can sorrow and illness affect that woman of the granite heart and brazen brow? I thought she could not feel. I thought she could not weep. Did you ever hear her speak of anyone of the name of Valentine?"

"No, never."

"Tell her the Valentine she once knew so well is an Orson now," he said; "but stay—how do you propose to get back to the Castle? See, it is high water. None but a mermaid can reach the Castle by the way you came."



"I must, then, go round by the marshes," said Juliet.

"No, follow me, and I will show you a better way—one you little dream of."

Juliet followed the Ghoul down a steep flight of steps in the rocks, formed partly by Nature and partly by the Ghoul. At the bottom of these steps was a slope—a green slope, which led them down to a piece of ground enclosed by a half-ruined, crumbling wall. The sea lay at a little distance, rippled and flooded with silver. Juliet recognised the ruins of the Abbey.

"Follow me," said the Ghoul, taking a small horn lantern from his vest, and with a match and tinder-box striking a light and igniting a bit of wax candle. He led the way to the mass of ruined buildings still standing, and, descending a flight of stone steps, Juliet found herself in what had been the cellars of the Abbey. In one corner was what appeared to

be a grated drain. It was in reality a trap-door. The Ghoul raised it, and another narrow flight of steps appeared. Juliet and Hubert descended them after the Ghoul.

"Now," said he, "we are in the subterranean passage of which you have doubtless heard. Many years of my life have been spent in restoring this passage. I found it blocked up in some parts, broken in in others, almost impassable everywhere. Now it's a pleasant walk. I'm proud of my work. Come—it leads to the Castle. It opens underneath the staircase in the west turret."

Juliet shuddered. Had this monomaniac, then, the power to make his way underground to that turret? A horrible suspicion crossed her mind! What if the monomaniac, as he certainly was, had murdered the little Earl himself? What if he had done that cruel, bloody deed for which Osmond was now im-

prisoned, and for which his precious life might be forfeited ?

Cold and faint with horror at the thought, Juliet followed the rapid strides of the Ghoul. It was a very long, and, to her, a very dreadful journey, so dark, so close, and smelling so mouldy. Fat slugs, brown and black, and enormous snails, crawled along the discoloured, arches and left a slimy track behind them. Bright-eyed, long-tailed rats scudded away at their approach. Spiders and centipedes abounded.

Yes, it was a miserable journey, but it came to an end at last. For suddenly, after about an hour and a half spent in following the Ghoul and his lantern along this damp, fetid, underground passage, the Ghoul touched some spring, she knew not how or where, but she suddenly found herself on the first-floor landing of the winding staircase of her own turret. The Ghoul, the lantern, and Hubert were gone.

The bright moonlight streamed in through the loopholes in the turret walls on to the winding stairs. They played on the richly carved black oak door of her own room. The ruddy glow of her night-lamp gleamed under the door. How thankful Juliet was to find herself once more in her own chamber, and to hear Dinah's soft, regular breathing when she approached the recess where she slept!

Juliet fastened her door. She hurried back to bed. There she lay for some time, shivering with cold and horror. By degrees she became first warm, and then sleepy. At last her eyes closed, and a blissful unconsciousness stole over her senses.

She slept soundly, deeply, dreamlessly, till a late hour the next morning. When she woke she heard Hubert's bark under her window; and as she did so, she began to doubt whether all the grim and strange adventures of the previous night had not been

a frightful dream or a ghastly nightmare. She looked from her window. Hubert was running loose about the garden. Alas! it had not been a dream! She had set him free, and a scarf she had worn the night before lay in the path, where she had doubtless dropped it.

## CHAPTER XVII.

I have a heart. I'd live  
 And die for him whose worth I knew ;  
 But could not clasp his hand, and give  
 My full heart forth as talkers do.

GRIFFIN.

It was Juliet's custom to knock twice daily at the Countess's door, to inquire of Mrs. Beagle how her ladyship had slept, and how she felt herself.

Mrs. Beagle, since she had been promoted by the medical man to the office of head-nurse to the Countess, had grown very overbearing, dictatorial, and saucy to the under-servants. To Juliet she had always been tolerably civil.

There were two ways into Lady Armine's

apartments—one through a little ante-room that opened on the landing, and which communicated with the dressing-room; the other an arched door way at the end of a corridor, and which admitted you at once into the bedroom.

Juliet, restless and wretched, had, while awaiting Daft Dyddy's appearance in the breakfast-room, strolled through the state apartments, the picture gallery, and the conservatories. The latter adjoined what had hitherto been the Countess's morning-room or boudoir. Just outside this room a flight of stairs led to Lady Armine's ante-room and dressing-room.

Juliet's heart bled for the unhappy woman, the stricken mother, the haughty Countess of Armine, as, on passing through her boudoir, her eyes fell on the ever-recurring evidence of the ruling passions of her later life, her pride in her son Osmond.

The portraits of the three fine, handsome sons who had called her mother, in oils, life size, and admirably grouped and painted, hung on one side of the fire-place. A picture by the same artist of Lord Armine, herself, and a little daughter who had died in her infancy, occupied the other. But the post of honour on the mantelpiece was devoted to a portrait of Osmond, taken about the time he became of age.

It was a speaking likeness, and, as is the case in all good portraits, the large, dark, expressive eyes, with their melancholy, loving beauty, seemed to follow poor Juliet as she moved about the room.

On a cheffonier were all the prizes Osmond had won at school ; and in glass cases about the room were all the pets he had ever loved, and, *à fortiori*, mourned, artistically stuffed, and their names, ages, the dates of their death, and some little epitome of their lives,



or an epitaph of some kind, engraved on an ivory slab.

And it was the hard, stern Countess who paid these tributes to creatures despicable in her eyes, as far as their own merit was concerned, for she never had a pet ; but all these were endeared and ennobled in her eyes as having loved Osmond, and been loved by him. Clay figures he had modelled, and drawings of his, maps he had coloured, were framed and hung up. Shells, pebbles, and seaweed he had collected, were stowed away in a curious old cabinet, and could be seen through its glass doors.

There were stowed away packets of Osmond's early letters, his school copy-books, toys he had cherished, and little specimens of ingenuity that he had made, and which would long since have been thrown away or demolished, had not his mother taken care of them, and treasured them in her cabinet, as

beloved relics of his dear boyhood. Several photographs of the darling of her proud, stern heart, lay on a work-table ; and, though she was no great adept at fancywork, she had in her work-basket a pair of slippers she was embroidering for him.

“ How she loves him ! ” said Juliet to herself ; “ and if she is at all conscious of the peril and misery of his position, what must her agony be ? It is nothing to me that she has always been cold, stern, and inimical to me ; I must love her for the love she bears my poor darling.”

Juliet ascended the stairs that led to the ante-room. She entered softly, intending to knock at the dressing-room door. It was ajar. Juliet suspected that neither Mrs. Beagle nor Hannah was with the Countess, for they were very talkative and bustling, and she could hear nothing but a low moan and an occasional sob. She drew near the door. At the end of

the room, and with her back to Juliet, was the tall form of the Countess, robed in her long quilted black silk wrapper. She was standing before an old-fashioned *escritoire*. She had drawn out the writing-table, and several packets of letters, the paper yellow and the ink brown with time, lay before her.

It was a singular result of the morphia, under whose influence Lady Armine was always kept, that the recent terrible tragedy of the murder of her little grandson, and her Osmond's committal to prison, were for the time obliterated from her mind, while events of the long-ago came back to her memory with the freshness of yesterday.

After searching for some time in the drawers and pigeon-holes of the *escritoire*, occasionally, as she did so, glaring with a scared look towards the half-open door of the bed-room, as if afraid of being interrupted,

Lady Armine found an old bunch of violets, carefully stowed away in a pocket-book of thirty years ago.

The violets were dried, flattened, and scentless, or emitting only a faint odour resembling very old hay. The blue ribbon that tied them was faded, speckled, and almost colourless.

The wild and morbid fancy of Lady Armine conjured up not only the original fragrance and freshness of the violets, but the deep love with which they had been offered and received. Tears dropped from those cold, stern eyes, on those early tokens. She took out of one of the pockets of the book a bit of silver paper. It contained the half of a plain gold ring. Another little paper, on which was written, "*Valentine to Irene*," next engrossed her attention. In it was wrapped up a short, thick lock of golden hair. She pressed the violets, the broken troth ring, and the lock of hair

together to her wasted bosom, and wailed forth the words,

“Valentine, Valentine! they told me thou wert false to me, else never, never, never could I have wedded another! And it was not true! Oh, Valentine! they lied, for their own evil, interested purposes, and thou wert desperate, and I was doomed! Forgive me, dear, dear Valentine!”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Whatever are you a-grizzling about, my lady?” exclaimed the shrill voice of Beagle, who had crept in on tiptoe, unheard by the Countess; “how ever can a ooman at your time o’ life let her poor old ’ead run on walentines, and faded wilets, and such fiddle-faddle? Now that’s just where it is, Hannar; we can’t so much as step down to breathe a breath of hair but she’s up to all manner, though Dr. Smyley says to me, ‘Mrs. Beagle, don’t let her ladyship grizzle or worret.’ But

give me here, this instant minute, wilets and walentines, and all—into the fire they goes at onst—and good rid of bad rubbish.”

The brutal woman tried to seize the violets, the broken ring, and the lock of hair. Lady Armine held them tightly clenched in her poor, thin hand. Beagle tried to force her fingers open. She could not do it, so she called Haunah.

“Lend a hand here, Hannar,” she said. “I’m obeying Dr. Smyley’s orders. She ain’t to fret and mope over nothing.”

“Oh! do not! for pity’s sake, Beagle, do not burn them! Lock them up, I’ll never look at them again, but do not burn them!” moaned the wretched Countess, as the two brutes forced her hand open, and they fell on the table.

“Oh! I daresay,” said Beagle. “You can eat humble-pie now, my lady, can’t you? But I ain’t going to have no more of this work;

so into the fire they goes, and all them old letters too !”

“Hold !” cried Juliet, rushing into the room. “Touch those papers and those relics at your peril ! Is this your treatment of the afflicted lady to whom you owe so much ? Stand aside ! My lady,” she said, “will you please to put back these letters into the drawers, and these relics into the pocket-book ? Here is the key.”

Lady Armine looked cautiously round.

“May I, Beagle ?” said the once haughty, tyrannical Countess.

“Of course, my lady,” said Beagle, not knowing how much or how little Juliet had overheard of what had passed. “Of course, my lady, your ladyship can please yourself. All I wanted was to obey Dr. Smyley’s orders, miss, and not let my lady worrit herself with bygones, or fret, or grizzle over anything. There, my lady, they’re all safe now. Gone

to bye-bye, as you must do for two hours. It's time, ain't it, Hannar?"

"Time's hup, marm," said Hannah.

"Thank you, Beagle," said Lady Armine, in an abject voice, and with an abject manner; "I've no complaints to make of you or Hannah. When Dr. Smyley asks me, I'll say you're both of you treasures, and so kind and attentive! He always asks me, doesn't he, Beagle?"

Then turning fiercely round on Juliet, she said—"What brings you here, Juliet Rivers? Who gave you leave to quit your room? Go back to it directly, and don't presume to leave it again without my permission. Get out of my sight, or Beagle and Hannah shall put you out!"

"You'd best go, miss," said Beagle, "for the doctor says a fit of passion might bring on aperplexy, or peralasis, or a fit o' some kind. Do go, miss, please!"



“Go!” shouted Lady Armine. “How dare you disobey Beagle?”

And Juliet, afraid to exasperate her, hurried away.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Their accents firm and loud in conversation,  
Their eyes and gestures eager, sharp, and quick,  
Shewed them prepared, on proper provocation,  
To give the lie, pull noses, stab and kick.

FRASER.

THE express train had just arrived, and all was bustle and excitement at the Exeter station. Civil officials were doing their utmost to help the first-class passengers. Private carriages and flies waited to convey them away, and there was a general rush to the enclosed space where the luggage was disgorged, and all were eagerly pointing out and claiming their own boxes, portmanteaus, &c.

Among this crowd, and remarkable for his

size, his bullying, overbearing manner, and a sort of vulgar dash in his appearance, was an individual who was attended by a black servant or footman, in a very shiny livery. A large and very handsome portmanteau, a dressing-case, and a leathern hat-box, formed the luggage of this traveller. He seemed to think that no one else's boxes, bags, or cases were of any importance. He swore at Cato, his black footman. He poked among the boxes and portmanteaus with his large gold-headed stick, and he seemed to consider himself of so much importance, that, on the principle that the world takes us at our own valuation, everybody around seemed to think so too, and the officials had neither eyes, ears, nor hands for anyone else until the stout young gentleman, his luggage, and black servant, had driven away in a two-horse fly to the best hotel in Exeter.

The young gentleman was not prepossess-

ing in appearance, and yet the only great defect of his figure was the superabundance of flesh. He was very tall and straight, and his features were tolerably regular. But there was a sly and sinister expression in his light eyes, and a certain coarseness and cruelty about his mouth. The upper jaw was large and prominent, the lips thick and sensual, and two large front teeth projected and rested on the under lip. The cheeks, too, were pale and puffy, and the brow and the chin receded. In this hirsute age, it was remarkable, too, that not a hair appeared on the fat, pallid face of the stout gentleman. He had neither eyebrows, moustachios, whiskers, nor beard. He was bald, too, strangely bald for so young a man—for he was not more than six or seven and twenty. What little hair he had was hay-colour.

Cato sat on the box with the driver. The stout gentleman had the large, roomy fly all

to himself. He seemed inflated with pride, exultation, and self-importance.

“How well I remember every inch of ground!” he said to himself; “there’s the public-house in which I hid myself for the whole day after that accursed fight with that brute Osmond Armine. How well I remember that day, and how all the beer I drank seemed only to make my bones ache and my bruises burn, and my heart sink more and more! How stiff, how sore, how down in the mouth ‘I was! How the young bully had blackened my eyes and punished my nose! How my lips were cut about, so that the beer made them smart a good un! How I cursed Osmond Armine then—how I curse him now! I swore I’d be revenged on him; and though it’s more than twelve years since I heard him, curse him! proclaimed cock of the school, and shouts of ‘Long live Armine! long live the young lion! and down with Big Ben!’ I

feel as if it was but yesterday, and I hate him now as I hated him then—nay, more, for I hate him now with the strength of a man, and I hated him then with the strength of a boy !”

As Benjamin Boulter, Esquire—for that was the name engraved on the brass plates on his luggage—thus soliloquized, the fly drove into the court-yard of the “Royal Hotel.” Out came the landlord and two waiters, napkin in hand.

“A nabob! a nabob!” said each, as they beheld the black footman on the box.

Big Ben—we hope our readers have not forgotten Big Ben—swaggered out of his fly and into the hotel, cursing Cato, swearing at the waiters, and looking very big as the landlord bowed, and the landlady curtsied.

“Private sitting-room, sir?” meekly inquired the landlord.

“Confound you, yes! Do you think I’m a commercial traveller, or some such gent?”

“Oh! dear, no, sir; I never thought such a thing for a moment.”

“Well, what have you got in the house?”

“Mock turtle soup, sir—first-rate—salmon, sir—lamb chops—ducks and green peas, young potatoes, cowcumbers, apricot tarts, custards, and any wines you please, sir—all first-rate.”

“Well, then, show me the rooms, and let dinner be ready in an hour. I’ll go and take a walk, just to stretch my legs, and get a little peckish. Now, be punctual, or I shall go on to the ‘Queen’s Head.’”

The landlord smiled a deprecatory smile, and led the way to a large and elegant sitting-room, looking on the market-place, and opening into a bed-room and dressing-room fit for the Prince of Wales.

Big Ben ordered hot water, said “Send my servant to me,” walked to the toilet-glass, and surveyed his fat pale face and projecting white teeth with great complacency.

“Old Boniface doesn’t know me from Adam,” he said to himself. “He forgets, but I don’t, that when ‘Ma’ and I came down here when first I came to school, we were put in two little rooms, or, rather, garrets; and now, because my uncle, the great New Orleans planter and slave-owner, has taken a fancy to me and made me his heir, and secured me a handsome income on his estate, and I can afford to travel with a servant, and dress like a gentleman, the best rooms in his hotel are not half good enough for me!”

He made a very dashing toilet while he thus communed with himself, Cato unpacking his portmanteau, and proving himself a very adroit valet, and frequently bobbing his round, woolly head, to avoid the dirty boots, boot-jack, and brushes, which his master shied at him.

At length, very fashionably, but rather too showily dressed, in a very sporting style,



jewelled and scented, Big Ben took his large gold-headed stick, hit Cato a smart rap on the head, and swaggered out in the twilight to reconnoitre old haunts, and get an appetite for dinner.

“Oh! won’t I pay you out, massa!” said Cato, rubbing his head. “You hurt this child very bad. You forget you no in New Orleans, massa! Cato free man here. What say great poet—black man’s poet friend—Cowper, great man—speaking of this child and all black men? He say, ‘Dey touch our country and deir fetters fall!’ No slaves here! No overseer, cruel brute! No floggy hee! Massa forget in England this child as he. Black man and white man all equal in England and in heaven! I pay massa out ’fore long. I free man! This child so glad!”

And he danced about the room, singing—

“I’m Old Bob Ridley, oh!

I’m Mr. Ridley, oh!”

He then availed himself of all his master's cosmetics, to beautify his own black skin, brushed his black wool with Big Ben's best brushes, oiled it with the choice and fragrant macassar, helped himself to a clean shirt, &c., out of his master's portmanteau ; and being very vain, and a great flirt and coxcomb, hurried down to see if he could get up a little flirtation with a pretty chambermaid he had espied on the landing, and whose red and white complexion, blue eyes, fair hair, plump figure, and merry laugh, seemed to Cato to constitute her "a foam-cradled Aphrodite laughter-fed."

Meanwhile, Big Ben sauntered away to look with snake-like eyes at the school, associated as it was with the great defeat and disgrace of his boyhood. He then made his way to the jail, to inquire at what hour the next day he could be admitted to see the Hon. Osmond Armine. He spoke of him as an old acquaint-

ance, and learnt that he could be admitted about noon the next day.

He passed Paul Paley's house, and, looking in at the parlour windows, he recognized his former victim, in spite of all the changes time had wrought. Yes, there he was at dinner with his old father. Big Ben wished he had had a revolver, and that they were in the Backwoods; but it was vain to think of such things in a crowded English city.

He made his way back to the hotel. The dinner was ready. Everything was excellent. Big Ben enjoyed it all the more, for he thought of Osmond Armine's prison fare. So he did his luxurious four-post bed of down when he contrasted it with Osmond's pallet.

"I'm glad I followed Nunky's advice, and came over to enjoy my revenge," he said to himself. "How I shall enjoy the trial! He hasn't the ghost of a chance! And then to see him hanged! Oh, how I shall enjoy that!

How I wish Nunky was here to share in the fun ! He hates Armine, for my sake ; and he was so glad to think I should be revenged at last ! He's a good Nunky—better than a dad to me."

Thus musing, Big Ben fell asleep, to which fact a loud, hog-like snore soon testified.

\* \* \* \* \*

Juliet had fixed, for her next visit with Mrs. Meeke to Osmond in prison, on the same day upon which Big Ben had decided on intruding on his old schoolfellow. Her head and brain were full of plots and plans for Osmond's escape, in case the result of the trial was unfavourable, and the jury found an innocent man Guilty, and the judge condemned him to death.

At this dreadful thought the devoted girl became so reckless and excited, that she could not remain quiet. She paced the garden with

agitated steps. She rushed wildly through the dark woods, and across the park, but nowhere found any rest, any peace, any comfort.

It was evening when she returned to the Castle, and the hour was past when it was customary with her to knock at Lady Armine's door, and inquire after her state. Still, she felt it to be her duty to ask whether there was any change for the better in the poor, half-demented lady. From what she had seen of Beagle's tyranny and cruelty in the morning, she wished, too, to come upon her unawares; for Juliet had almost made up her mind to complain to Dr. Smyley of the odious Beagle. She, therefore, entered the ante-room, gently opened the dressing-room door, and stood for a few moments unperceived in the Countess's bed-chamber.

Although the weather was very close, there was a roaring fire. Mrs. Beagle sat by it in

Lady Armine's purple velvet easy-chair, with the Countess's coronet on the top of the carved gilt framework. Her feet were on the purple velvet and gold footstool. Hannah and she were at supper. Rump steak, fried with onions, and a very odoriferous Welsh rarebit, formed their repast—a mug of stout and one of hot punch, which Hannah had just brewed, were their chosen dilutents.

On a stool at some distance sat Lady Armine, and by her on a chair was a cup of tea. She seemed to be in a sort of stupor or lethargy; and as the fierce blaze of the fire played on her pallid face and wasted form, Juliet saw, with a pang, that her face was expressionless, and her form that of a skeleton.

“Well, Hannar,” said Beagle, “let's taste your tippie; and here's a toast, ‘Down with the Armines!’”

“Wretched woman!” cried Juliet, coming forward, “how dare you sit in that chair,

and cook, and eat, and drink, and keep up a roaring fire here? I will tell Dr. Smyley how infamously you behaved, you cruel, wicked woman!"

"La, Miss," said Beagle, "it's no odds to my lady if we does enjoy ourselves a little. She don't take no notice of nothink, poor dear; and nussing and sitting up o' nights is dry wasting work, and we wants support! And my lady would sit in her own chair, and so I just thought to rest my poor back a bit—but I meant no harm, Miss."

"What's that, Beagle?" said the Countess, waking from her lethargy. "Is that you, Juliet Rivers, you disobedient, audacious creature? Go to your room! How dare you interrupt Beagle at her supper? It's not my fault, Beagle; she's here against my will, but she shall go!" cried the wretched woman, rising in a violent passion; and, seizing her stick, which leant against her chair, she was

about to rush at Juliet, when a sort of fit paralysed her limbs. She fell forward, and had not Juliet caught her in her arms, she would have dashed her poor old crazy grey head against the fender.



## CHAPTER XIX.

He slept the deep sleep of the full-fed hog,  
Who snores and snorts, and dreams he's at his trough.

LASCELLES.

BIG BEN awoke after ten hours of sound sleep. His was that dreamless repose which waits on people who, like Benjamin Boulter, Esquire, have very bad hearts and very good digestions.

The sun—the soft, mellow, golden sun of September, was streaming into his large and handsomely furnished bedroom when he awoke. Black Cato was already in attendance. He had got a large tepid bath ready for his master. Big Ben was very careful of his health. And every morning Cato had to sponge the great

fat, primrose-coloured porpoise, as he sat in his bath—showering water on his bald head through a sort of colander, to form a sort of shower-bath; and then rubbing dry with Turkish towels, and spending about an hour in shampooing him, and in the use of “Dinneford’s patent horse-hair renovating gloves.” This done, Big Ben went through a series of gymnastic and calisthenic exercises—which were a source of great pain, peril, and discomfort to Cato. Cato’s next duty was to take from his tyrant’s dressing-case a small silver watering-pot and water his clean shirt (covered, by way of pattern, with fox’s heads, for he affected the sporting man), with “*bouquet de fleurs de Paradis*.”

For his early morning costume Big Ben donned an Apollo cap, of turquoise blue velvet, embroidered with silver; a quilted satin wrapper of the same hue; and slippers to match, richly embroidered. Very fair and very clever

fingers had embroidered both the cap and the slippers.

"Order breakfast," said Big Ben, with an oath and a curse, to old black Cato, "and give me my meerschaum."

On the bowl of the meerschaum was the portrait of a quadroon of exquisite beauty. But still the beauty peculiar to those who have what in vulgar parlance is called "black blood" in their veins. There were none of the classical and flowing outlines—none of the soft ovals—none of the delicate chisellings common in European and even in Hindoo beauty in the glowing delineation of Lolah. But yet there was a voluptuous and irresistible charm. The features in their softness, and the cheeks and chin in their roundness, were almost those of a child. But there smouldered a fire in the large black eyes, with the blueish whites, that betrayed the half-caste. There lurked a power and a sarcasm, too, about the

deep-red mouth, which showed that a woman's passionate heart belonged to that face of almost cherub beauty. The hair, thickly rippled, had escaped any admixture of wool. It was silken in texture, but growing something as wool does. It fell in silken torrents on either side the dark olive face, whose cheeks had a faint and exquisite tinge of vermilion, and shaded a neck of perfect beauty.

The original of this beautiful and highly-finished miniature was a lovely quadroon about fifteen—a strange, wild, fitful girl, who, like the celebrated Octoroon of the New Adelphi, had been educated as a lady by a great planter her father, although she was only his illegitimate daughter by a mulatto woman. The good planter died insolvent, and the beautiful Lolah, with her grandmother, “Coal Black Rose,” an old negro cook, were sold to the highest bidder—Simon Soames, of New Orleans, maternal uncle to Big Ben.

Coal Black Rose became cook in the family. Lolah's beauty inspired such passion as he could feel in the fat heart of Big Ben. The poor girl discovered her danger in time, and, by the aid of the brother of one of her school-fellows, effected her escape, and got on board the *Ocean Queen*. She thought she was alone, but her devoted old granny, Coal Black Rose, had discovered her secret, and contrived to get herself on board the same vessel, concealed among the bales of cotton. By this vessel, too, Big Ben, in pursuit of his revenge on Osmond Armine, was also a passenger.

Big Ben, puffing away at his meerschaum, sauntered into the sitting-room, where breakfast was laid out as for a prince.

"Go to the post-office, Blacky," said Big Ben, "and inquire for any letters addressed 'B. B. *To be left till called for*;' and mind you're back in the twinkling of a bedpost, or I'll play the part of flog-master myself!"

"It not be de first time massa flog dis child!" said Cato, as he hurried away, singing as he went—

"De first time dat I got a licking  
Was in de fields of cotton picking;  
By golly, it made my eye-balls dingle,  
It made me laugh, it made me tremble!  
I'm Old Bob Ridley O!  
I'm Mr. Ridley, E I O, I'm Old Bob Ridley, O!"

Big Ben was enjoying his second cup of chocolate and his third devilled kidney and plate of buttered toast, when Cato returned with a letter. It was written in a beautiful female hand. The paper was of the costliest description, and richly scented. On the blue seal was the name "Lolah." The letter ran as follows—but before we give the reader an opportunity of reading Lolah's letter, we must explain her somewhat anomalous position.

When Big Ben discovered that the beautiful object of his vile passion was on board the *Ocean Queen* as a first-class passenger, and especially confided to the care of the captain,

he discovered that the lion's skin being a vast deal too short, he must eke it out with the fox's, as the old fable has it. He very respectfully claimed acquaintance with the lovely Lolah. He soon succeeded in winning her childlike confidence, and learnt that her object in getting to London, besides that of escaping from his unwelcome and degrading suit, was to become a teacher in a school. She had a recommendation to the head of a ladies' establishment at Clapham, given her by the governess who had presided at the boarding-school where she had been educated.

All this Big Ben elicited from the unsuspecting Lolah, before the presence of Coal Black Rose was discovered. In the end, Big Ben induced Lolah and her granny to take up their abode at Brompton, promising Lolah to make her his wife as soon as he had arranged some important business. And now for Lolah's letter :—

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“MY DEAR BENJAMIN,

“When are you coming back? I don't like being moped up here, with no one to speak to but the landlady, the maids, and old granny. Why couldn't you take me with you? And now you are away from your uncle, if you love me, as you say you do, I expect you will do what you promised when we landed, and make me your wife. Granny says she has promised you I shall not stir out till your return, and she will keep the blinds down, and the garden gate locked. I shall fret myself quite ill if I am to be shut up like this, and look a very sorry bride. If you are likely to be delayed a day or two longer, send word to granny that I am to drive out. I want to see the parks, and Regent Street, and the Pantheon, the City, and all the sights and shows, particularly Madame Tussaud's; and I want to buy a bridal veil, and new bonnets, and wedding dresses, and mantles, and orna-



ments. What's the use of all the money you have given me if I can't go anywhere to spend it? So come or send for me at once, or you will find my eyes red with crying, and my cheeks pale with grief.

“Your unhappy

“LOLAH.”

“I don't see why I should *not* have the jade here. I can take a cottage in the suburbs, and watch over her myself,” thought Big Ben. “Well, good comes out of evil. I little thought when first I discovered that Lolah's old grandmother, ‘Coal Black Rose’ (Nunky's cook), had hidden herself up in the vessel among the cotton bales, in order not to be parted from her grandchild, that the old baggage would ever be of any use to me; but it seems she does do her duty, and enforces my authority by keeping Lolah a close prisoner, and having the blinds down. Why, if

that sweet face of thine, Lolah," added he, apostrophising the portrait on the bowl of his meerschaum, "were once seen at the window of Clematis Cottage by any of the young Dunderaries or old Oglebies of the day, my bird would soon be enticed away into some splendidly gilded cage, and I should lose the only human being I ever cared a brass farthing for ! But I'd be revenged ; I'd shoot the wolf that carried off my lamb. Ay, I'd shoot him as I would a dog ! And now," he added, "I must dash off a few lines to Nunky and to Lolah, and then it will be time to go to the jail ! There I shall see that fellow Osmond Armine—see him for the first time since I left him cock of the school, and skulked away myself like a beaten hound. I little thought then that the next time I saw his confoundedly handsome, hated face, I should find him in prison for the murder he had no hand in. Ay, and better still, I shall see him swing for it, too !"

He walked to the chimney glass. The light fell full on his projecting teeth and thick lips. A cicatrice on the upper lip, which gave it something of the appearance of a hair-lip, corresponded with a broken front tooth.

"Those are his work. That's his sign-manual, curse him !" said Big Ben to himself, growing livid with rage and revenge as he gazed at them ; " how they spoil my beauty ! But, no matter, they have kept alive my vengeance !"

" For years have I vowed and plotted REVENGE ! But till I heard of the deaths of the old Earl and Osmond's two elder brothers (Loftus and Jaspar), I did not see my way to a revenge that would satisfy me. When I did, I did not let the grass grow under my feet, and I must say that Nunky (though I didn't tell him how I meant to wreak my vengeance on my enemy) was very anxious to see me revenged. There's a power of ven-

geance in the old planter yet. How he cut into that fine girl Black Tulip, because he was told she'd call him Old Beelzebub! Didn't he flog her in fine style! Ah! he got a taste for that work, and a knack at it, too, when he was an overseer himself. As it is, he likes to be by when any cowhiding's going on, and no one even seems to come up to his idea of a 'good whip.' Oh! he sympathises with vengeance! He says he does; and he's proved it, too! I'll write a note to Lolah, and a letter to him, and then I'll dress and pay my respects to 'Osmond, Earl of Armine,' as he *is* by rights, and as the world would own him, if the jury found him NOT GUILTY, and he escaped the gallows; but that he won't do. No! no! the circumstantial evidence against him is strong enough to hang a bishop, as they said at the inquest. The motive as clear as the sun at noon-day! Oh! the wiseacres! Oh! won't it be

prime to see him swing! I rather think it will!"

Big Ben then ordered black Cato to bring him his writing-case. His first letter was to his uncle, his mother's brother, the vile—the rich planter, Soames.

His letter ran thus:—

"MY DEAR NUNKY,

"I take up my pen to report progress. Everything is working towards one great result—my full and entire vengeance, and the utter ruin of my enemy, as there is not the smallest doubt he will be found Guilty, and be hanged by the neck till he is *dead, dead, dead!* His name, too, will be handed down to the execration of all after-time.

"As you say, dear Nunky, this scamp has been a long time coming—considering that I have been already six months in England, and shall probably have to remain four or five more

—for he will not be tried till the spring assizes come on. You said you would not ask any particulars as to how all this came about. And you're right—*Litera scripta manet*—‘Slow and sure’—is the motto of the Boulters; *Finis coronat opus* is that of the Soames's, I know.

“I told you how I found, after all our hunt in every imaginable hiding-place, that the sunny little quadroon Lolah—your slave and mine in New Orleans—had actually found friends to get her on board the *Ocean Queen*, pay her passage as a first-class passenger, place her under the especial care of the captain, and recommend her to an educational establishment at Clapham as a teacher. Of course, on a British merchant vessel, the jade was free. So I had to finesse; with a little soft sawder I soon got the little coquet's confidence. I've been obliged to promise her marriage; but I shall only get a fellow I know to put on a

parson's band and surplice, and read the marriage ceremony in my own sitting-room. Lolah's as ignorant as a babe, and she'll think that all right, and then I'll bring her back to New Orleans, and you shall teach her humility.

"I think I mentioned in my last how cunningly 'Coal Black Rose' had concealed herself in the vessel, in order not to be parted from her grand-daughter Lolah. We were well out at sea before she was discovered. Then she came out with her old story about having promised her poor mulatto girl, who died from a flogging, never to leave her orphan Lolah; and the captain and all the crew believed, with tears in their eyes, and took old Coal Black Rose's part. So that when I wanted her tied up, to give her a cool hundred, on your account, the captain very saucily reminded me that the boards on which we stood were of British oak, and that his vessel was a fragment of Great Britain itself, and there were

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no slaves in Queen Victoria's dominions, and that any one, however black, who set foot on a British ship or British soil, was free. So, not to let Coal Black Rose hear all this, I gave it up, and she's been very useful to us. On board the *Ocean Queen* the cook fell ill and died, and she performed all his duties to perfection. And since we've been in England, during my absence, she's kept a strict watch over my vain, flighty, beautiful, bewitching Lolah, who, but for Coal Black Rose, would have been gadding about, and showing her black eyes and white teeth at the window, and would probably have been run away with, ere this, and a valuable slave lost to both of us.

"I shall be very glad, dear Nunky, when all is well over—Osmond Armine hanged, my vengeance accomplished to both our hearts' content, and we all of us safe back with you at 'The Vineyard.' Then I know you'll give old Coal Black Rose the flogging (and with



cent. per cent. interest) that she escaped on board the *Ocean Queen*; and well she'll deserve it, for leaving you without a competent cook. Cato, too, will want a good cow-hiding—or rather a dozen. He grows fat and lazy. My compts. to Black Tulip; she was in bed, shamming ill after her flogging, when I came away. I hope she soon got well enough to have another taste of the cow-hide. There's nothing like it, Nunky. Oh! if you could see the airs the 'helps' here give themselves, you'd say with me—'Slavery for ever!'

"I hope to set sail for New Orleans the day after Osmond Armine's hanged. Till then, believe me ever, dear Nunky, with a lively sense of your liberality and kindness,

"Your affectionate and dutiful nephew,

"BENJAMIN BOULTER."

To Lolah, Big Ben wrote as follows:—

"Is its own pretty bird tired of its cage?"

and does it want to fly away to its own master, to peck out of his hand and to sit on his shoulder? Well, then, in a day or two, if it will be a dear patient little birdie, he'll come and fetch it, and put it in a pretty cage near this place; and as soon as possible it shall go back to its own dear home in the West. It may expect its own master to-morrow night, and he hopes to find it in high beauty and good spirits and good humour, and the next day he'll take it out in a smart brougham, and it *shall* see the parks, and Regent Street, and all the sights; and it shall spend all its money, and buy bonnets, and dresses, and all sorts of pretty things; but it must wear a double brown gossamer veil, because its own fond master can't bear to have it stared at by bold men, and he knows it is a desperate little coquette, and, dearly as he loves it, if he caught it at any of its old tricks of ogling and smiling and looking behind, he must punish it;

and he'd much rather not, for it pains him as much as it does his pretty Lolah. So she must be a dear good little bird, for her own sake and that of her devoted

“BENJAMIN.”

“P.S.—As soon as matters are a little settled, Lolah's Benjamin will send for the parson and the book, and make Lolah his dear little wife; and then they'll go back together to New Orleans, and won't she be a proud little bride, and won't he be a dotting bridegroom, and won't Nunky be glad, and old granny, too?”

These letters finished, Big Ben made an elaborate morning toilet, and taking them with him to post them, he set out on his proposed visit to Osmond Armine in prison.

## CHAPTER XX.

*Eug.*—Why, 'tis fidelity!

*Desmond.*— . . . Fidelity!

The instinct of dogs and——women.

OLD PLAY.

JULIET had arrived at Mill House at an early hour. As she found it impossible to rest or to occupy herself, and as the kind vicar and vicaress were going into Exeter, and offered her a place in their wagonette, she thankfully accepted it, and arrived at least two hours before Mrs. Meeke expected her. This, however, made no difference in the cordiality of the kind Quakeress's reception of the anxious and unhappy girl.

When Juliet reached Mill House, she found that Hubert the bloodhound had followed her to Exeter.

"It may please poor Osmond to see this faithful creature," she said to herself; "I will ask Mrs. Meeke to let him accompany us."

Mrs. Meeke readily agreed, and Hubert, as if he understood what was passing, licked her fat white hand, and whined for very joy.

Tryfena was rejoiced to see Juliet. The beautiful and delicate young Quaker maiden looked very pale and very fragile, but she was up and busy with good works. She took a very lively interest in arraying Juliet in her own best bonnet, shawl and dress, for her visit to Osmond Armine.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as Neighbour Meeke could get some very important household duties dis-

patched, she declared herself ready to attend Neighbour Juliet.

Everything at Mill House was regular as clockwork. Every hour had its appointed duty; everything had its appointed place. Order reigned supreme in this quiet home. Scrupulous cleanliness and extreme neatness pervaded the whole establishment. The mistress being so exact, the servants were the soul of order and punctuality.

The neat Quaker maids, in the simple and serene costume of their sect, had no crinolines, no faded artificial flowers, or flaunting ribbons, and yet the postman, the baker, "the beer," "the milk," and the policeman, as well as the more prosperous tax-collectors, were much more smitten with Mrs. Meeke's dove-eyed Dorcas, her prim Priscilla, her demure Deborah, and her rosy Rhoda, in their close Quaker caps, grey alpaca dresses, white neckerchiefs, crossed over their modest bosoms, and

snow-white aprons, than with all the ill-made, absurd hoops, flounces, and flowers, of the maids in other houses.

AH Neighbour Meeke's maids might have married over and over again. They, however, knew when they were well off, and dismissed their admirers with a gentle—"Nay, friend, thee must look elsewhere for a help-meet. I am too well pleased with my present condition to wish to change it."

Again the quiet, dark-green chariot, with a large "M" on its panels, in lieu of armorial bearings, bore Juliet and the kind Quakeress to the prison, Hubert crouching down in the bottom of the carriage, the huge creature gentle as a lamb and quiet as a mouse, and seeming to know that something secret and solemn was going on. Again the double gossamer completely concealed Juliet's lovely face. Again she was supposed by all who saw her by Neighbour Meeke's side, and leaning on

that kind creature's arm, to be Tryfena, the saintly maiden, Neighbour Meeke's only daughter, whose whole young life was entirely devoted to good works.

\* \* \* \* \*

No pen could describe the boisterous ecstasy of poor Hubert when, in the pale, careworn, shadowy being in the cell, he recognised his master ! He bounded forth with cries almost human in their joy and their exultation. He nestled his large, honest face in Osmond's breast ; he licked the pale face over and over again ; he poked his black muzzle among the neglected masses of dark-brown hair ; he stood on his hind legs with his fine, broad, thoroughbred, tan forepaws on Osmond's shoulder, examining his wasted cheeks and pinched features with tears in his lustrous eyes ; and finally, he hid himself under Osmond's bed.

Juliet thought Osmond looked worse than when she had seen him last. He seemed to



her paler, more worn, and to have a depressed and anxious expression of countenance.

It appeared that his counsel was very desponding about the result of the trial, and it struck Osmond that this eminent man believed him guilty.

"If *he* believes me guilty of this foulest of foul murders," said Osmond—"he to whom I have revealed the little all I know concerning the ghastly tragedy—what hope is there that a jury will acquit me?"

"Did you tell your counsel," asked Juliet, "of my interview with the Ghoul?"

"I did," replied Osmond.

"And what said he to that?"

"Don't be angry, dearest Juliet," said Osmond, "when I tell you that he looked upon the whole story as the romantic dream of an excited brain."

"But," said Juliet, "since then I have seen this monomaniac of the marshes again, and I

am prepared to prove that he has access by a subterranean passage, of which, as you well know, tradition has preserved a record, between his own freehold on the marshes and the winding stair of the turret. Nay, more, my last interview with this singular being has left on my mind a strong suspicion that he himself, in revenge for some injury which he imagines he has sustained, may have committed the cruel murder—which seems too savage and horrible, indeed, to have been done by any one but a maniac.”

As Juliet spoke, a light seemed to be rekindled in Osmond’s eyes, and a flush irradiated his pale face. The ray was that of Hope. The flush was a reflex of the purple light of Love, called back into Osmond’s fainting heart by these new proofs of Juliet’s bravery and devotion to his cause.

“Friend Juliet,” said the kind Quakeress, “it were well that thou shouldst thyself ob-

tain an interview with friend Osmond's counsel, and that thou, with the convincing and irresistible tongue of truth and love, shouldst unfold to the learned lawyer the mysterious tale thou hast but now told to us. I myself will bear thee company to the presence of the counsel learned in the law."

"How shall I prove my gratitude for all your goodness?" said Osmond.

"And what can I do to convince you of mine?" said Juliet.

But at this moment the door was opened, a turnkey, not Hart, who was absent in attendance on a very obstreperous prisoner, but one who occasionally waited on Osmond, ushered in a tall, stout, fat, pale-faced personage, saying,

"A gentleman who wishes to see Mr. Armine—an old schoolfellow, he says he is, sir."

Osmond started to his feet. At a glance

he recognized Big Ben, the bully. There was not much change in Big Ben. He was, of course, much taller, much stouter, much more puffy ; but he was only the Big Ben of former days, as he would have looked seen through a powerful magnifier.

Osmond, on the contrary, wasted with misery and long confinement, was the mere shadow of the young Apollo he had been when he first entered that prison.

Big Ben stood staring at his former foe, the object of the concentrated revenge of twelve years, with a smile of exultation on his hideous mouth. His thumbs were in his waistcoat pockets, and he balanced himself on his toes and heels as he said, in answer to Osmond's question,

"To what do I owe this visit, Mr. Boulter?"

"Why, as I happened to be in this rotten old country, and found the Britishers and the

papers full of nothing but the mysterious child-murder at Armine Castle, and you, old horse, in limbo for doing the trick, I thought I'd just come and have a squint at you, my gone coon, and tell you I mean to be present at your last appearance on any stage—ay, if it costs me a pony for a reserved seat.”

“I see,” said Osmond, “that the lesson I gave to you in yon field has profited you little, and that the brute and the bully you were then you are now, only increased in bulk and matured in malevolence!”

“Ay! wouldn't you like to pitch into me as you did twelve years ago?—wouldn't you like to leave more of your infernal marks on my phiz? But just try it on, you rattle-snake, and I'll have you handcuffed before you can say Jack Robinson.”

He had scarcely uttered these words in a menacing tone, Juliet and Mrs. Meeke rising to interfere, after vainly trying to silence Big

Ben, when Hubert, who, from beneath Osmond's bed, had been eyeing the bully with eyes that glared like balls of flame, while his mane bristled and he showed his white tusks, uttered a tiger-like growl, and, with one bound, flew at the bull throat of Big Ben!

At this terrific and unexpected attack, of what seemed to the coward bully the attack of a Numidian lion, the huge legs of Big Ben gave way, and he measured his huge length and breadth on the floor. Hubert, still with his huge fangs fastened on the fat double chin of Big Ben, held him fast, and rolled on the floor with him.

The wild screams of the ladies, and the croaking, half-choked noises made by Big Ben, brought in Hal Hart and an under turnkey. But vain were all the efforts of both these officials. Although they belaboured poor Hubert's finely-shaped back with the handles of brooms which they had found in

the passages, the thorough-bred creature would not give way until Osmond uttered a low whistle, saying very gently,

“Hubert, come hither, sir !”

At his master's command, the noble, well-trained bloodhound, whom no blows could intimidate or subdue, released his hold, and was about to return to his hiding-place, when the prostrate bully, thinking he saw an opportunity of a safe vengeance, kicked the retreating Hubert savagely in the stomach, passing his huge foot between his hind legs ; but he reckoned without his host.

Hubert turned fiercely round. The next moment his sharp fangs met in the toe of Big Ben's patent leather boot. Visions of lock-jaw flitted before the closing filmy eyes of the bully, and with the agony of the pain, and that of the wild terror of a horrible death, Big Ben fainted.

Again the jailers had vainly tried the effect

of their broom-sticks on the high courage of Hubert. Again Osmond was obliged to call the fiery bloodhound off the swooning bully.

At this moment Paul Paley came in to pay Osmond his customary visit. With the instinct of his profession, of which he was a very skilful member, he, in spite of his loathing for the wretch, whom he recognized at once, applied himself to restoring Big Ben to consciousness. To do this he found it necessary to bleed him freely in the arm. Terror, and the acute pain in the ball of his great toe, had caused Big Ben's fit to partake of the nature of apoplexy.

As the dark blood flowed from the bully's fat white arm, he opened his dull, light eyes, and asked where he was. As no one thought fit to answer his question, he rubbed his eyes with his fat white hand, saying,

"Oh! I remember, this is the prison—I came to see him—in his cell—I've seen him,



and I'll see him hanged, too—and now I'll go back to the Royal Hotel."

He rose, but, still faint and giddy, he found he could not stand.

"You had better send for a fly," said Paul Paley to Hal Hart; "let Mr. Boulter be taken back to his hotel. One of you had better go with him—he's not out of the wood yet."

These words caught the ears of Big Ben, who was very nervous about himself.

"I hope, Dr. Paley," he said in a whining tone—for he had heard the turnkey call the young doctor, Dr. Paley, and he knew him besides, for he had seen him the night before, although he did not pretend to recognize him—"I hope, Dr. Paley, you'll attend to me till I'm well. My toe is confoundedly painful, and fearfully stiff and swollen, and so are these bites in my neck—see how they've bled!—besides which, I am cursedly afraid of lock-jaw;

and if ever that brute goes mad I shall die of hydrophobia. I'll go back to the hotel, and get to bed at once, if you'll come and prescribe for me, doctor."

"I will send my assistant, Mr. Boulter," said Paul Paley; "my own time is fully engaged to-day."

"Well, I hope he's a competent man; but I must say, as you've taken upon yourself to bleed me, you ought to see to my case."

"I will give all necessary instructions to Mr. Wallace, my assistant," said Paul Paley.

"I hope he's a regular practitioner," persisted Big Ben, speaking with the thick lisp habitual to him. "I hope he's passed at Apothecaries' Hall, and is a Member of the College of Surgeons."

"He has; he is every way competent, and is very experienced."

"Well, lose no time in sending him to me. Oh, you brute!" he added, *sotto voce*, in

answer to a low parting growl from Hubert ;  
“ I’ll shoot you the first chance I get, as sure  
as my name’s Boulter ! ”

“ The fly’s waiting, sir ! ” said the under  
turnkey.

“ Help me down, and go with me to my  
hotel, and I’ll give you a brace of dollars,”  
said Big Ben ; “ crowns, I mean.” Then,  
turning round as he reached the door, he said,  
“ If we don’t meet in court, I shall be present,  
as I told you, old horse, when you make your  
last appearance on any stage. Look out for  
me in the reserved seats, the sofa stalls.  
And you, you brute,” he repeated, between  
his teeth, “ you’re doomed ! ”

Hart and the turnkey then half led, half  
lifted him into his fly. The latter, at his re-  
newed entreaty, accompanied him to his hotel.

He went at once to bed. There he was  
attended, in the course of an hour and a half,  
by Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Wallace was an allopathist of the old school. Finding Big Ben's throat and toe a good deal inflamed, his pulse quick, his skin hot and dry, and his manner excited, he went to work according to the system in vogue at the beginning of the century. He cupped the patient, leeches, blistered, and dosed him well.

Two nurses, of the Sairey Gamp and Betsey Prig school, were sent in to attend Big Ben day and night. Cato took the opportunity of the total helplessness of the tyrant he loathed, to amuse himself as he pleased. No one cared for the wretch who lay so completely at the mercy of an allopathist and two hired, mercenary nurses.

To a sort of delirium, caused by loss of blood, and perhaps dread of lock-jaw or hydrophobia, had succeeded a deep dejection.

How he was ever to release himself from the doctor who called three times a day, and

the nurses who snored all night, took snuff, and were always eating and drinking, Big Ben could not conceive.

He lay, large hot tears rolling down his pale cheeks—loose and flabby, but fat no more—very weak, for the allopathist kept him on chicken broth, beef tea, and barley-water, and he felt as if he could gladly have eaten the rump steaks his night nurse regularly fried with onions for her own supper! and he longed with an unutterable longing for the quart pot of the creamy stout with which she diluted her steaks.

So far, Big Ben's pursuit of vengeance had been disastrous indeed!

If he expressed any wish to rise, and to have anything substantial to satisfy the cravings of a stomach which for a whole fortnight had received nothing stronger than beef-tea, his nurse shook her head, and Mr. Wallace treated him as light-headed.

Things were in this state, when, one evening that Big Ben lay, faint and famished, watching, with hungry eyes, his day nurse, Mrs. Gobbit, enjoying her substantial "tea," with its poached eggs and frizzled ham, a well-known voice, or, rather, two well-known voices, were heard through the half-open door of the bed-room, in parley with the landlord.

"De young lady must see massa!" said one speaker, in a shrill treble. "He is de young lady's intended husband! and he no come, no send, no write, some one letter dated dis Hotel Royal. So we got fright, and come to see what ails massa!"

"Has he been very ill?" asked a sweet voice, at whose sound a dusky flush suffused Big Ben's pallid face.

"Oh, uncommon bad, miss," said the landlord. "Perhaps I'd better call the nurse. He's two nurses, miss—one off, one on. I'd

better ask Mrs. Gobbit if you can see him."

A sign from old Coal Black Rose made Lolah say, "Oh, I'm quite determined to see him!"

"As you please, miss," said the landlord; "that's the door of his room."

"Where's his own man, Cato?" asked Coal Black Rose. "What he want nurses for when he got dat idle feller?"

"Mr. Cato 'is taking a walk," said the landlord; "but he'll come back to his tea."

"Ah, I warrant he will!" said the old negress. "He'll take care of himself, no matter what come of his massa."

Lolah and her grandmother then entered the darkened room, where lay Big Ben, who went into hysterics of joy at the sight of any human beings who cared one straw whether he lived or died.

Old Coal Black Rose was not only a capital cook, she was an excellent nurse; and, indeed,

like so many of her class, something of a doctor too. Lolah, too, had a good head and a strong will of her own.

Coal Black Rose soon discovered that all that Big Ben required now was what she called kitchen physic. Lolah, at Big Ben's request, paid off his two nurses, and dismissed Mr. Wallace.

Coal Black Rose undertook to wait upon him. Under her care he was soon able to move into the sitting-room, and even to drive out with Lolah and herself.

Lolah and her grandmother had probably saved Big Ben's worthless life; and as he sate, propped up by pillows, feasting sumptuously, or driving through the now wintry scenery, he was engaged in plotting how he could carry out his plan of getting a worthless scamp of his acquaintance to personate a clergyman, so as to deceive Lolah and her grandmother by a sham marriage.



As his strength returned, his desire to accomplish this base object increased. It haunted him night and day.

He was, indeed, the more ardently bent upon this piece of villany, because he had remarked that a young and fashionably-dressed man, well mounted, frequently passed and repassed the fly, in which he now daily drove out with Lolah and her grandmother.

This young man had an eyeglass in his eye, which was levelled at Lolah's soft Quadroon face. Once or twice he had seen him from the windows of the hotel walking up and down the street, and glancing up at the sitting-room where Lolah was. He had met him, too, on the stairs of the hotel.

Big Ben saw with jealous rage that when this beau appeared on horseback, passing the carriage-window, Lolah's olive cheek became crimson.

"I'll write to Rothsay at once," he said ;

“I’ll take a lodging in the suburbs, buy a ring, borrow a prayer-book, and get the mock marriage over, so that Lolah and her granny may think all’s right. Delays are dangerous. She blushes when she sees that young fop. If I don’t look sharp, I shall have the only girl I ever loved—the only creature worth living for—carried off before my eyes, or behind my back. Let me see! first the mock marriage, then the trial, then the hanging, then off back to the West and old Nunky. Oh, I forgot! I’ve sworn to shoot that dog—and so I will, as sure as my name’s Boulter!”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

